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COMMON THREADS: THE MEANING OF NEEDLEWORK TO ORDINARY WOMEN

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1996

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April 5, 1996
Date of Acceptance by Committee

March 29, 1996
Date of Final Oral Examination

DANIELS, GLENNIE OVERMAN, Ph.D. Common Threads: The Meaning of Needlework to Ordinary Women. (1996). Directed by Dr. Mary Y. Morgan and Dr. Sarah M. Shoffner. 111 pp.

This research sought a clearer understanding of the meaning of needlework to ordinary women in their daily lives. The aim of this project was to inquire into the significance and purpose of needlework in women's lives and to increase awareness of its potential usefulness in the lives of others.

Conversations with contemporary needleworkers were examined using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This interpretative method of study was chosen because it encouraged the participants' dialogue, explanation, interpretation, and partnership in the study. Researcher and participants cooperated to reach mutual understanding of the common threads throughout their lived experiences. Additionally, the researcher investigated the results of published oral histories of women's accounts of their needleworking as well as quantitative data to look for commonality and uniqueness among the different sets of texts to shape an understanding of the phenomenon.

Six women needleworkers who differed in age, marital status, parental status, employment status, education, socio-economic level, and level of needlework skill were interviewed. Four interviews of approximately one hour each were arranged with the individual women. The responses to similar, although not identical, questions were audiotaped and transcribed. With cooperative effort between researcher and the women, analysis and interpretation of the data revealed a primary theme of needlework as therapy for the women. Secondary themes common to the women were predictability, creativity, accomplishment, learning, and family.

The women's texts embellished the data from quantitative study, enhanced the texts of recorded histories, and provided greater understanding of the meaning that needlework has for women. In their words, needlework told the truth about real life at a given time and place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank all persons who provided guidance, encouragement, and assistance throughout this study. Special appreciation is directed to the members of my committee: Dr. Mary Y. Morgan, Dr. Sarah M. Shoffner, Dr. Barbara Clawson, and Dr. Penny Smith. Sincere gratitude is expressed to the six women participants for their unique contributions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Introduction

Decorative needlework is almost as old as humankind. As with many other crafts, stitchery had its beginning in people's daily needs. Adam and Eve "sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7). Early Oriental embroideries indicate that once two pieces of material were joined to create a seam, it was decorated with stitching (Meilach & Snow, 1970). Contemporary needlework continues its utilitarian function as well as being an expression of ideas through the use of texture, pattern, and color of fabrics and threads. It is proposed that needlework is the art that tells the truth about the real life of people at a given time and place (Lane, 1963).

Needlework may be considered as one of the oldest of arts. Written history does not take us back to a time when there was no needlework (Symonds & Preece, 1928). Although needlework survives from about 500 BC to the first century AD, it was not until the twentieth century that textile scholarship began to receive serious consideration as women became interested in recording the history of needlework.

There have been periods of distinct interest in certain types of needlework. These interest periods can be linked to prevailing ideas and attitudes. At the turn of the eighteenth century, when Americans were involved in exploring unknown territory and sailing to unknown ports, embroidered maps became a needlework fashion of the time (Davidson, 1968). Mourning or memorial embroideries were initiated following the death of the first President of the United States. During the Victorian era "it was certainly the first duty of a wife and mother to make home the pleasantest and happiest spot on earth" (Addie E. Herbin in Dyer, 1994, p. 146). Needlewomen crocheted, quilted, tatted, and sewed in response to the social message that the

happiness quotient of the home was relative to the amount of needlework it contained. In the 1920s, hooked rugs were considered to be the key to understanding women of the past. In the 1970s, quilts became the center of interest, and they represented the key to women of the past (Gordon, 1979).

Recent years have seen a phenomenal resurgence of consumer interest in needleworking. According to a nationwide study conducted in 1994 by Market Facts Inc.,[1] there is at least one crafter in 90% of U.S. households. This represents an increase of 9.8% over the 82% figure from the 1992 consumer study and a 41% increase over the 1988 study. Needlework has the most widespread participation (80% of households) with cross-stitch/embroidery experiencing the greatest growth in popularity (Ancona, 1994b, p. 4; The Bottom Line, 1994, p. 16).

Justification for the Study

The majority of scrutiny has been given to the history of techniques, patterns, and materials; the process and the product of needlework. In 1916, Candace T. Wheeler was instrumental in forming the Needle and Bobbin Club, "a serious, research-minded organization" (Gordon, 1979, p. 24) devoted to scholarly study of needlework and publication in its Bulletin. It was in this time period that the realization dawned that the history of the needlework of the world was the history of women. In Development of Embroidery in America, Wheeler (1921) argued needlework could be read for clues about woman's frame of mind. Georgianna Brown Harbeson (1938) published American Needlework: The History of Decorative Stitchery from the Late 16th to the 20th Century. As an advocate of needlework, Harbeson attempted to see a clearer picture of domestic life and the environment of women through the eye of the needle. Finley's (1929) Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them, Hall and Kretsinger's (1935) The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America, and Peto's (1939) Historic Quilts used a folklorist approach and attitude to study quilts and the women who made them. An interest in women's lives as well as their art was evident in work such as Julia Cherry Spruill's (1938) Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies.

William Dunton (1946) continued the inclination to view women through their needlework. In his book Old Quilts, he hoped to stimulate in the mind of the reader "a greater respect for the needlework of the women...and for their artistic ability which found expression with the needle and fabrics rather than with brush and paint or modeling tools and clay" (p. 1).

The women's movement of the 1970s rekindled interest in scholarly investigations into the history and nature of needlework. Focus on the labor that was epitomized by needlework throughout history constituted a widespread development in contemporary feminist thinking. Review of projects such as The Dinner Party (Chicago, 1979), The Birth Project (Chicago, 1985), and the AIDS quilt initiated by Cleve Jones in 1987 indicated emphasis on needlework which was created for public expression of symbols, rituals, images, and culture. Scholarly interest in needlework has continued into the 1990s.

> In the past two decades visual artists and art historians, social historians, folklorists, poets and novelists, and most recently literary critics and theorists have discovered in the processes and product of the spindle, shuttle, and needle a major source for understanding women of the past, and as well, a source of subject matter and of images and metaphors for new creative work. (Hedges, 1991, p. 338)

Despite the increased interest in needlework, it is surprising that so little scholarly research has been conducted into the meaning of needlework to contemporary women. The craft industry has led recent research into the meaning of needlework to women with the motive of encouraging economic gain for entrepreneurs. The value of needlework as a human document has been established; yet why do women need the diversion of needlework? Study of women who do needlework and the conditions surrounding its making contributes to the understanding of the socio-psychological and socio-cultural status of women and provides information beneficial for decision making by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the areas of family, education, work, and leisure.

Survey research commissioned in 1990 by Clapper Communications Companies[2] created a profile of crafters including their reasons for participation in crafts and key demographic data

useful for entrepreneurial purposes. The survey yielded valuable information about women's interests in crafts and purchasing patterns, but neither the words of the stitchers nor their passion is found in the lists of numbers.

In 1994 the American Home Sewing and Craft Association (AHSCA) commissioned a study to determine whether sewing has any stress-relieving benefits. This quantitative research produced significant findings regarding the role of needlework in the reduction of stress.

While consideration of needlework as craft and as meaning to women is juxtaposed in the trade literature, there has been meager opportunity for women to add the richness and detail of their own stories. Missing from both trade journals and scholarly literature are women's versions of how they put individuality into their needlework and how their choices of fabrics, colors, tools, and patterns used in their needlework parallel the choices they make in the designs they create for living their daily lives.

Throughout history needlework has been a medium of expression in almost every culture of the world. Women have extended the necessity of sewing for their families to include creative and decorative embellishment. The needle has been thought of as a woman's instrument. The needleworker as artist has used needle and thread instead of brush and paint on canvas. Women have also used the needle instead of the pen to express themselves in a socially acceptable way while concurrently making beautiful objects for themselves, their families, and their homes. Consequently, a great deal of social-cultural history, particularly of women, is written in needlework. It expresses their country's history, culture, traditions, and philosophy. In addition, each piece of needlework is the work of an individual, so it expresses characteristics that make her unlike any other person. The literature indicates that women historically have turned to needlework as a means of coping with extraordinary life cycle events: marriage, birth, illness, and death. Included intermittently are stories told by women about their need to use needlework to deal with everyday activities of living. Women's needlework expresses a way of living that they take for granted.

Definition of Terms

"The basis of any form of craftsmanship is man's material need, and the earliest records of his history are looked for in his handwork" (Symonds & Preece, 1928, p. 3). Necessity caused early civilizations to intertwine natural fibers to supply their material needs. Sewing became essential in order to create materials large enough for effective use. "In needlework...the material determines the tool...and when perfected...there was no limit to the development of stitchery whether for use or for decoration...It is not the stitch itself, but the manner of its use which constitutes the art of embroidery" (Symonds & Preece, 1928, pp. 10, 11).

The term needlework can inclusively refer to all work done with a needle. Needlework can then be broken into various categories by identifying different characteristics of the diverse types of each (Evans, 1994). Caulfeild and Saward (1882) defined needlework as a "generic and comprehensive term, including every species of work that can be executed by means of the Needle [sic], whether plain or decorative, and of whatever description the Needle [sic] may be" (p. 354). The emphasis in this study is on handsewing, although references are made to objects which include some machine work. Related crafts such as knitting, crocheting, and tatting are included because they are generally considered to be needlework.

In this project there are three major categories used for classification of various types of needlework. These forms of needlework are defined because they are mentioned in the reviewed literature as well as being part of the transcripts of the participants I interviewed. A more complete definition of terms is found in Appendix A.

Counted threads

This category of needlework is stitched on an evenly woven background fabric using a needle and different types of threads to create a design. The term counted refers to any needlework in which the stitches have to be counted. The stitches cover intersections of the background threads to create the design. These include cross-stitch and needlepoint.

Surface embroidery

Surface embroidery includes needlework whose designs are not completed by counting threads. Instead a pattern is stamped on tightly woven background fabric. The stitcher uses various threads and a sharp needle with a large eye to follow the printed design. These include stamped embroidery, crewel, and smocking.

Needle embroidery

In needle embroidery the threads are not worked into a background fabric. Instead threads, manipulated by needles, are used to form designs. These include knitting, crocheting, Battenburg lacemaking, tatting, and quilting.

Reflection

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. It begins with understanding one's own everyday life. Personal insight enhances one's ability to look into the meaning of events in the lives of others. "Through attentiveness to others and rigorous awareness of ourselves, we create knowledge that is as close to social reality as we are going to get" (Thompson, 1992, p. 10). Phenomenological research rejects the notion that the knower and the known are separable. Instead it assumes that "the knower and the known are of the same universe. To polarize the subjective and the objective falsifies reality, and the possibility of knowing them" (DuBois, 1983, p. 111). Understanding the "passionate participation of the knower in the act of knowing" (Polanyi in DuBois, 1983, p. 113) as well as valuing the relationship of the knower to the known enhances the "illumination of our vision of the world" (DuBois, 1983, p. 113).

Autobiography in phenomenological research is instructive because it leads us to discoveries of meaning against the background of others' experiences. We discover that we do not exist separately from one another; "that every life story, including our own, counts" (Cahill, 1994, p. xviii). If we examine our own story before looking at the stories of others, it provides a light behind the shadows of things.

> When symbols are linked in one's mind to the order behind them, they are understood in a different way. An object viewed only on the level of itself will have no objective meaning, but when it is seen as a sign of invisible things, it serves as a support and reminder of another level of being. (Sulzberger, 1979, p. 71)

Naming and examining my values and goals and recognizing my biases gave illumination and depth to the study of the stories of the participants in this research. It allowed me to understand something about the common threads in the fabric of our lives as women.

Following Peshkin's (1988) advice, I acknowledge that my experience affected my interpretation of the stories of the participants in this study. Phenomenological researchers assert that "all research necessarily comes to us through the active and central involvement of researchers, who necessarily interpret and construct what's going on" (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 196). Recognizing this subjectivity gave an added dimension to the examination of the women's stories. Kleinman and Copp (1993) recommend that the researcher examine rather than ignore her feelings and link them to the analysis of investigations. Instead of hoping that emotions will go away, Kleinman and Copp (1993) suggest that the researcher use them to sharpen understanding. Coming to terms with her own ambivalence can help the researcher understand her participants. Emotion can help to uncover areas that might have been overlooked. Recognizing the interdependence of researcher's and participant's affective and cognitive networks make qualitative research more complete. Kleinman and Copp (1993) and Peshkin (1988) identify the need for the researcher to take account of her feelings and assess their effect on results. Peshkin (1988) notes that care must be taken to avoid becoming defensive and distorting analysis and understanding. "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's experiences are" (van Manen, 1984, p. 51). Therefore, I include my story realizing that its value is measured by the extent to which my experience could be the experiences of the women with whom I talk.

Societal factors combine to form a female consciousness. Women give expression to this consciousness in their everyday lives. One way to understand this consciousness is in the interpretation of the ways that people represent themselves to themselves and to one another.

> There are places in our society that are predominantly and distinctly female spaces, such as...fabric, yarn, and variety stores. There are also many art forms that are specifically female...such as quilting, needlework, tapestry...and weaving. There is not one woman's culture; there are many. There are also connecting patterns among them.
>
> One woman will say to another "You know what I mean" when, engrossed in sharing experience, words elude meaning. The other will nod in understanding. This communication comes from a shared consciousness of ordered meanings and symbols. (Aptheker, 1989, p. 13)

Van Manen (1984) recognized the importance to phenomenologists of having had and acknowledging real life experiences, "of standing in the middle of life, of having a sense of practical wisdom that comes from working and living with those in whose lives they have pedagogical interest" (p. 50). My life experiences as entrepreneur, educator, mentor, needleworker, and researcher provided understanding about the fabric of our lives as women and enabled me to "find an insightful path into the conscious and unconscious lives of women and to discover a whole world in needlepoint [sic] in a context that few would take seriously" (S. Shapiro, personal communication, May, 1994).

My Story

One of my earliest memories is of sitting in my little chair beside my grandmother piecing quilt blocks. Grandma used patterns she copied from magazines and cut from almost-worn-out oil cloth. Her fabrics came from remnants from other sewing projects. After she cut stacks of geometric shapes from the fabrics, she dropped the leftovers into my scrap bag. Grandma showed me how to chose the scraps with just the right colors and shapes to sew together. My work formed blocks for a String Quilt while her blocks became quilt tops with names like Wedding Ring, Flower Garden, and Cathedral. Both she and I knew that our quilt blocks were

equally beautiful. While we worked, I learned the skills necessary for using a needle, thread, and scissors as well as concepts about color, line, and design.

In the spring Grandma and I claimed the space where the farm equipment had been stored for the winter and set up the quilting frame that Grandpa had made many years before. Since I was not yet six years old, my job was to sit on the floor and watch the beautiful designs evolve as Grandma's stitches joined a quilt top to batting and backing to form a finished quilt. What an exciting day when we removed our quilt from the frame and took it home for everyone to see!

In addition to piecing and quilting, Grandma taught me how to use a little "store-bought" crochet hook and cotton twine to make dish cloths. She showed me how to manipulate the big wooden crochet hook Grandpa had whittled for us to form salvaged fabric strips into a rug. I also watched with fascination when she showed me how she took four double-pointed needles and magically turned blue yarn into wool socks.

As a young woman, I was the wife of an Army enlisted man living in a cold, sparsely-furnished apartment in Berlin, West Germany. With limited knowledge of the language and a more limited budget, I sought a way to entertain myself during the days and weeks that I was alone. I found a needlework shop, chose fabric, thread, and pattern and began to teach myself to do stamped cross-stitch. I worked for months and was fascinated with my cumbersome progress. The needlework project successfully occupied my time and resulted in a pretty addition to my otherwise dreary furnishings. It did not, however, ignite an interest that was sufficient enough to encourage me to seek additional projects.

After I returned to teaching in the United States, I observed that one member of my professional cohort took advantage of every hiatus in our schedule to work on counted cross-stitch. I liked the way her finished products looked and decided to investigate further. I went to a craft shop, and chose fabric and materials to complete a sampler for my newborn nephew. Even though I had limited knowledge about this type of needlework, I was satisfied with the

completed work. In the past my first projects had been comprised of errors that indicated ignorance and inexperience with the craft. This counted cross-stitch project was simple to do, essentially error free, and aesthetically pleasing to me. Both the process and the product gave me a sense of pride and satisfaction.

After fourteen years as a teacher, I needed respite from the frustration and stress of this occupation. Without a lot of premeditation, I decided to open a needlework business. I had little needlework expertise and even less business knowledge, but I was eager to take the risk. The shop was a success from the beginning. I did all the tasks it took to operate and maintain the business. I offered needlework classes once a week; they quickly filled. I added more classes. I received invitations to give speeches, demonstrations, workshops, and seminars to people of all ages, abilities, and interest levels. I worked at least fourteen hours a day six days a week, and I loved it. I did not feel the frustration and stress that had accompanied my position as a school teacher. I discovered that I enjoyed this environment even though it was demanding of my time, money, and energy.

Many women have owned successful businesses and have felt the satisfaction of knowing they have found their occupational niche. What brought me from entrepreneur to researcher? The comprehensive-generalist nature of my home economics background contributed to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for a wide variety of professional roles. As a home economist in education, I had been trained to interpret the needs of the individual, to facilitate learning, to be alert to the interrelationship between social issues and the individual. As a home economist in business, I had the skills to gather and interpret data about consumer needs as well as organizational goals. I knew how to diagnose needs of society, consumers, and business and how to execute plans to meet consumer needs and business objectives. I had learned how to interact effectively with consumers. I was able to consider the impact of social actions on individuals and families. As a home economist in research, I had learned the skills to interpret the needs of individuals and to recognize the impact of research on enhancing

human life. I was able to recognize the presence of a research question in the business context. By having an awareness of the nature and scope of research, I could adapt the research process, tools, resources, and strategies to the worksite.

My abilities and skills as a home economist in education, business, and research were compatible with the trend toward relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is characterized by marketing toward the individual customer and away from mass marketing. There is an emphasis on the retailer's finding what the individual customer wants and needs. Instead of trying to find more customers to fit the product, the retailer's task shifts to finding more products and services to fit customers. It begins by collecting information on each customer by observing purchases and continues to include collecting personal information data. A customer-retailer relationship includes not only prices and profits but also caring and loyalty (Ancona, 1994a).

I did not follow the time-honored dictum, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Rather I began to treat others as *they* wanted to be treated. To learn how they wanted to be treated, I became an inquisitive person. Largely through observation I determined how to deal with my customers. What were their likes and dislikes? What were important issues with them? Research reported by Farrell, Peguero, Lindsay, and White (1988) illustrates that one of the most effective ways to learn what is happening in a particular place is to go to that place and ask the people who are there. By building profiles of typical customers, I determined that they are not all alike and none of them was exactly like me. I learned to try to put myself in the place of my customers to understand the "workings of their minds" (Bethards, 1994, p. 100) as a business strategy. As I continued to practice relationship-marketing techniques, the procedure became less a business scheme and more a research design.

The stories of my customers led me from an interest in the meaning of needlework as a marketing strategy to a human science question. What is the meaning of needlework to

women--ordinary women living their daily lives? This question became the focus of this phenomenological inquiry. The method of investigation must fit the problem and the goals of the research question. Neither self-report surveys, questionnaires, nor observation had adequately captured the complexity and richness of the everyday practices of the women as they stitched their chosen needlework projects. I wanted to understand what they thought they were doing, intended to do, or said they were doing. By examining women's narratives, I expected to gain an insight into the role their needlework played in the ways the women conducted their daily lives.

Statement of Purpose

Because needlework is often underrated and devalued, its potential usefulness in the lives of women has not received the study it deserves. The aim of this inquiry was to seek a clearer analysis of the meaning of needlework to ordinary women living their daily lives. The purpose of this research was to inquire into the ways that women seek meaning through their needlework. To achieve this purpose, I used a hermeneutic phenomenologic methodology to examine results of interviews with six contemporary needleworkers in the light of published oral histories of women's accounts of their needleworking, as well as results of survey research and clinical research to focus on the common threads woven through the different sets of texts that shaped understanding of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

For centuries women have generated needlework that has been recognized for its documentation of life in the home and its reflection of cultural patterns. Women have put their creativity into needlework which exists "in fantastic variety wherever there are women, and which...[is] a universal female art transcending race, class, and national borders" (Mainardi, 1973, p. 58). There is much to be gained by learning more about the women who were able to synthesize their domestic and cultural roles. By examining the history of needlework and the context in which it was generated, we can begin to comprehend the significance of needlework to ordinary women.

What is the meaning of needlework to ordinary women? One purpose of this literature review is to explore how the interrelationships among the history of needlework, women's use of needlework, and the role of needlework in women's lives led to the formulation of this research question. A second purpose is to expose gaps in the body of scholarly knowledge as a result of inadequate methods of data collection. Evidence will be offered to support the logic for selecting hermeneutic phenomenology as the strategy to examine facets of women's lived experiences from the needleworkers' perspectives.

History of Needlework

The history of needlework is long and colorful. Why do scholars need to know the history of needlework? Throughout history no other tangible art has been so associated with women. To investigate the history of needlework is to learn about the roles of women in their families and their homes. Fashions in needlework and documentation of the context in which they were produced are indicative of culture of the period.

Very few textiles which predate the beginning of the Christian era have survived, but sculpture and paintings show that embroidery was applied to garments and wallhangings. Throughout western history, embroidered fabrics surviving after the birth of Christianity were used for ecclesiastical decoration. The nuns of the churches developed methods of stitching on fabric to enhance the scarves and towels used in the services. Early secular uses for embroidery included tapestries which depicted battles and conquests. Other lay uses for embroidery consisted of decorated tunics of noblemen and royalty (Evans, 1994; Meilach & Snow, 1970; Symonds & Preece, 1928).

The nuns who decorated scarves for the church altars were also the educators of the ladies of the court. Needlework was the paper and pencil of the time with the stitchers spelling out the lesson of the day in thread. The nuns did not show their methods of stitching to anyone outside the inner circle of the courts and high church. One lady of the court, Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of King Henry VIII, is recorded as the person responsible for the development of needlework in the English world. When members of the court saw the detailed needlework Queen Catherine stitched into her husband's clothing, they wanted the decoration applied to their garments. Queen Catherine began to teach selected members of her court the methods of stitching. Gradually certain privileged peasants were shown how to accomplish the needlework. By day they stitched for the courts, but at night they stitched for their own families. In time the display of decorative needlework became widespread; by the sixteenth century secular needlework became a popular form (Evans, 1994).

In the early seventeenth century when people travelled to the New World to form the colonies, some women stowed their valued bed hangings, embroidered silk quilts, and samplers and brought them on the voyage. For the next several decades settlement left no time for needlework that was not utilitarian. Women in early America worked beside men sharing the responsibility of building the new country (Bell, 1938).

> They bore children, buried children and husbands, and survived....They helped to clear the forests, work the fields, chop wood, build fences, defend their homes and families...tended children, grew vegetable gardens, made candles and soap, cooked, cared for livestock, and fished. A few were painters, poets, writers...fought in war...were blacksmiths, printers, engravers, and silversmiths. They ran businesses, engaged in commerce, administered property. Beyond and above all the things they did, they sewed. (Swan, 1977, p. 12)

Needlework took two forms--"plain" and "fancy." Plain sewing included the sewing that was used to create simple clothing and household items such as towels and sheets. This work required uncomplicated stitches. All women were responsible for this type of work. Mending, patching, and darning were additional forms of plain needlework employed to extend the usefulness of garments and furnishings (Ferrero, 1987; Vincent, 1988).

In addition to plain sewing and mending, young girls learned to knit stockings and mittens for family members. Knitting was considered to be plain work because "the knitter manufactured a functional, rather than a decorative, object" (Vincent, 1988, p. 2). The everyday stockings and mittens were marked with numbers or initials to facilitate matching them into pairs. These marks were often a girl's first attempt at embroidery.

An early American girl learned plain needlework beginning as soon as she could manipulate a needle. A common girl had to know how to sew because as a housewife, she would have to make and mend all the clothing, bed linens, and towels the family had. A wealthy girl needed to know how to sew since she would be responsible for teaching servants, directing their work, and doing some of the work herself. Knowing plain work was necessary before the wealthy girls could learn the techniques of fancywork (Ferrero, 1987).

Fancy needlework was decorative and nonutilitarian, and it required more difficult stitches. After mastering the simple stitches of plain needlework, girls began to learn fancywork and completed one or more samplers. In the beginning, samplers were intended to be a reference work for the embroiderer. The first pattern book was published in 1523. Before pattern books were widely available, designs were recorded by embroidering samples of stitches on a strip of cloth kept for that purpose, regularly increased by examples over a long period of time (Bath,

1979). In its simplest form, a sampler contained only alphabets and numerals. Girls learned to embroider letters and numbers because as adults they would mark their linens with initials, names, dates, and inventory numbers.

Samplers held another significant position for intermediate needlework students. To the alphabets and numbers the young women added short phrases, verses, names, dates, and places. The inscriptions demonstrated "knowledge of literature, geography, and the Scriptures...grasp of moral principle...pride in family and sense of beauty" (Vincent, 1988, p. 8).

Advanced stitchers added motifs, figures, animals, flowers, and scenes to samplers to create ornamental pictures. These depictions demonstrated the extent of the stitcher's skill. Learning tiny stitches also taught the young girls patience, forbearance, and contentment with the female role (Chicago, 1979; Ferrero, 1987). Completed decorative samplers were hung on the wall of the girls' homes and became a part of nineteenth-century interior design to testify to the achievement of talented daughters and to the financial and social position of families (Bank, 1979; Christie, 1909; Vincent, 1988).

Only women in financial circumstances which allowed them enough leisure time to practice and master the stitches could indulge in purely ornamental work. Instead of samplers and silk embroidery, women were more likely to embroider garments and household linens traditionally made in the homes. Baby clothing, caps, petticoats, table linens, and bed coverings wore out and needed replacing enabling women to practice their decorative needleworking. Most surviving needlework is fancywork because it was likely made to become a cherished memento. Plain work was used, reused, and then cut down to be used again.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century many families became prosperous enough to allow the women to pass the chore of plain sewing on to servants unless a husband insisted that his wife complete the task herself. As plain sewing became less necessary to survive, some women grew impatient with the demands of needlework of all kinds (Swan, 1977).

Trends in education provide an insight into the changes in needlework styles and the changing roles of women. A young lady's needlework skills, like her manners and her looks, were counted a part of what made her desirable as a wife. Girls of well-to-do families were sent to young ladies' academies to learn the necessary skills of "good manners and posture, reading, dancing, and above all, needlework" (Weissman & Lavitt, 1987, p. xi). Although there was some disagreement regarding the scope of education to which women should have access, many writers and educators agreed that "no matter what other skills or knowledge a women strove to attain, skill in needlework was of first priority" (Dewhurst, MacDowell & MacDowell, 1979, p 12). Westtown, a Quaker school, as well as the Moravian school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, were influential in initiating interest in particular needlework fashions such as embroidered maps and mourning or memorial pictures (Davidson, 1968). Bailey (1945) tells of a young woman's excitement in anticipation of attending boarding school in Boston to "take up the pianoforte, needle-point, painting, and French" (p. 155). Ornamental needlework, dancing, and music were taught in the girls' schools as a "resource for women when left to themselves" (Spruill, 1938, p. 108).

> In the country life of America there are many moments when a woman can have recourse to nothing but her needle for employment. In dull company, and in dull weather, for instance, it is ill-manners to read; it is ill-manners to leave them; no card-playing there among genteel people....The needle is then a valuable resource. Besides without knowing how to use it herself, how can the mistress of a family direct the work of her servants? (Ring, 1975, p. 7)

The nineteenth century marked the beginning of public and charity schools which were open to large numbers of girls regardless of their socio-economic status. The number and geographical availability of schools increased, and a larger number of girls gained access to formal education which included schooling in the practice of needlework.

Girls who did not receive their needlework training in a conventional classroom setting were taught by their mothers, grandmothers, or older siblings. Needleworking was one area in

which women could control the education of their daughters (Ferrero, 1987; Mainardi, 1973). Needlework training included instruction in practical and ornamental work. The first stitches a young girl learned were utilitarian. Many girls learned to sew seams by stitching fabric scraps together during a daily stint. A stint required that a specific amount of work be done each day rather than a specific amount of time be used. Young girls were encouraged to complete their first small quilt by the age of five. As they learned sewing under the watchful guidance of older females, they absorbed attitudes and role expectations that society held for women. By the time she was engaged, a young woman aspired to have completed a dozen quilts. Her thirteenth quilt was her Bridal Quilt (Dewhurst et al., 1979; Ferrero, 1987; Munro, 1983; Showalter, 1986; Swan, 1977).

After 1830 schools and curricula began to change. In private schools needlework became an extracurricular activity. In public schools when girls were offered instruction in needlework, it was usually plain sewing, not fancywork. Simpler forms of needlework evolved to provide surface decoration for functional objects. To be a successful needleworker required only an ability "to count properly and correctly place stitches" (Vincent, 1988, p. 32). Embroiderers obtained instruction and explanation of stitches, materials, and terminology from printed manuals and periodicals such as Godey's Lady's Book first published in Philadelphia in 1838. Godey's offered instructions to women who wanted to take up new kinds of needlework without a teacher. Young women continued to make samplers, silk embroidered pictures, mourning pictures, white work, and other handwork with which a woman of the time was expected to decorate her household.

With the Victorian age came an emphasis on a tight family unit and a very rigid set of duties for women. Housewifery was on its way to becoming not just the expected occupation of a woman but an exalted position for her. Numerous books and new women's magazines "glorified the female's involvement in domesticity and...presented sewing patterns to assist and encourage women in their devotion to homemaking" (Swan, 1977, p. 41). Women were

assured that these handwork items were "not trifles but arts that, elevating human feeling above animal instincts, make men and women better and families happier" (Dyer, 1994, p. 146).

Following the Civil War, American needlework underwent significant changes. Inventions, chemical discoveries, and changes in retail marketing and mailing provided new materials and opportunities to needleworkers. The invention of the sewing machine had a great impact on plain sewing. The sewing machine was welcomed by both homemakers who saw it as a timesaver and by women's rights proponents who recognized it as a release from household drudgery. Some advocates purchased sewing machines as a way of being progressive women (Ferrero, 1987). By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly every woman in the United States had access to a sewing machine.

Plain sewing became a solitary occupation as the work became less portable. Instead of gathering in groups, the women now sewed alone in their homes. Even though the sewing machine could be set up in the room with family members, it required so much attention that mothers could no longer easily listen to children recite their lessons as they sewed. Women who sewed for a living began to work long hours in factories instead of in their homes. The introduction of the sewing machine had brought an end to wide-scale hand sewing and started the exodus of women from the home (Bath, 1979). Sewing became an occupation rather than a "household chore, a craft, or a refined pastime" (Vincent, 1988, p. 54). Girls were still urged to learn sewing skills, but only as a potential occupation should the occasion arise.

The invention of sewing machines affected not only plain sewing but also fancywork. Embroidery machines made embroidery a factory job. Interest of home sewers in embroidering their clothing and household linens decreased dramatically during this period. As women were liberated from their necessary sewing, they were encouraged to seek new ways to use their time. Some women's rights advocates hoped that women would pursue more active and lucrative quests; whereas, popular literature urged women to cultivate the "accomplishments and charms" of hand-wrought fancywork skills (Ferrero, 1987; Pullan, 1859).

The establishment of domestic cotton printing factories and peddlers carrying cloth throughout the countryside increased the popularity of quilt making. Around 1840 until 1860, pieced quilts were popular among all segments of the population. There were few books with patterns or instructions on quilt making; patterns were circulated by word of mouth and instructions were handed from one generation to the next. The technique of quilting was simple and required only the basic stitches of plain sewing. By the later part of the century, some writers in ladies' magazines, such as Godey's and Peterson's, "began to deplore the waste of time it took to make such an unfashionable bedcover as a cotton patchwork quilt" (Weismann & Lavitt, 1987, p. xii). Women who read these magazines turned to various forms of elaborate Victorian needlework including silk crazy quilts, Berlin wool work, counted thread samplers, knitting, crocheting, and tatting. Decorative needlework that had been favored among the upper, and then the middle classes, prior to 1876 now suited women at all levels of the social and economic scale. As more working class women could afford to embroider, fancywork declined in popularity among wealthy women and among young women. The social climate was changing. In the last years of the century "a woman who sewed or made other types of fancywork was either elderly or poor and very often miserable" (Vincent, 1988, p. 94).

> Wealthy women...spent their days traveling in Europe, playing tennis or croquet, or socializing with their peers. Middle-class young women could attend business schools or colleges, and could consider having a career. Even working-class women had a much wider range of occupations open to them. Many women still sewed, but it was now their choice to do so. Needlework was no longer pastime and duty; needlework was now a craft and a diversion. (Vincent, 1988, p. 94)

Although certain women continued to do needlework, it was not until the 1920s and the 1930s that there was a convincing renewal of interest in American needlecrafts. The magazine Antiques began publication and included articles on needlework in its early issues. Women returned to needlework as "wholesome, pleasant" (Gordon, 1979, p. 26) ways of spending spare time. Interest in samplers, embroidery, and patchwork quilts became stronger.

In the 1940s and 1950s new synthetic fabrics strengthened interest in needlework. Women began to see their needlework less a pastime activity and more an expressive, creative outlet. The post-war period was a time when women returned to the home after an active role in factories and business during the war. The emphasis on domesticity, home, and hearth was strong. One of the few places where women could make personal statements was in their needlework. In 1948, Catherine Christopher wrote in the introduction to The Complete Book of Embroidery and Embroidery Stitches "few pursuits can rival embroidery for the opportunity it affords [the woman] to impress her creative ability...tangibly upon her surroundings" (In Gordon, 1979, p. 31).

In the 1960s, the women's movement drew attention to the value of women's work and encouraged a resurgence of interest in needlework among the general public. Crewel embroidery depicting brightly-colored floral designs reflected the hopeful optimism of the decade. In the 1970s, interest in needlework continued to grow with emphasis on various forms of embroidery and crocheting with a shift from practical to decorative items. Artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro found "new inspiration and self validation" in women's needlework (Hedges, 1991, p. 338). Chicago and Schapiro resurrected many traditional needlework techniques in their artistic creations. Credit for the revival of counted cross-stitch is given to Ginnie Thompson in 1971 in Pawley's Island, South Carolina (Retailer, 1994).

Popularity of needleworking continued into the 1980s and 1990s with interest in counted cross-stitch, needlepoint, and quilting taking the lead. A 1994 nationwide consumer study indicated that 90% of United States households had one or more family members involved in crafts. In 80% of American households, needlecrafts remained the category with the most widespread participation. Cross-stitch, embroidery, crochet, fashion sewing, needlepoint, home decor sewing, and knitting ranked among the top thirteen crafts in the nation. Top uses for the needlework projects included gifts, personal use, home decorating, holiday decorating, and items to sell. Contemporary needlecrafters were older, more suburban/rural, and less affluent

than nonparticipants (Profiling, 1995, p. 101). As the twentieth century ends, traditional types of needlework persevere; however, purism in technique and stitches is arguably no longer as important as the aesthetically pleasing result.

Role of Needlework for Women

Needlework cannot be separated from the history of the country. Political, social, aesthetic, and technological changes have all affected needlework. It is a concrete record of individual women's responses to these forces and events, to their families' needs, and to their own desire for self-expression.

The literature indicates that needlework has been useful in a variety of ways in the lives of women. Historical and social factors limited the contributions of women in various fields of endeavor. "The ideas that defined and confined [women] to their domestic spheres not only deterred many women...but also influenced the nature of the work they created" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, p. xvii). Women worked within the limitations dictated by their social role to explore their interests with "a vigor and ingenuity that often resulted in strong visual statements" (p. xvii).

The emphasis on learning needleworking skills at an early age provided women with the proficiency they needed to express themselves in socially acceptable media. The women's creations found favor among friends and family because they conformed to the prescribed role of women. The production of needlework augmented women's status within their domestic role rather than challenging prevailing social norms, thereby enabling women to articulate with needle and thread when they otherwise would not have been allowed to speak. Needleworkers were able to find beauty and value in what was commonplace to others. Their creativity was not paralyzed by day-to-day responsibilities and the practical concerns of life; they were able to synthesize their domestic responsibilities and their need to be creative. Women not only made beautiful and useful things, but expressed their own convictions on a wide variety of subjects in

a visual language for the most part comprehensible only to other women (Bell, 1938; Dewhurst et al., 1979; Mainardi, 1973).

In their needlework women were expressive and often creative. Plain sewing provided women, who had little or no help in their households, an opportunity to sit down for a period of time and let their minds wander while keeping their hands busy; for to be idle was thought to be sinful. "The true economy of housekeeping is the art of gathering up all the fragments so that nothing be lost...fragments of time--as well as materials" (Child, 1832, p. 3). Plain sewing was a task that lent itself to socializing. Women could take it with them when they went visiting, or they could pick it up while they were entertaining guests at home to keep their hands busy during so-called leisure hours (Peto, 1939; Swan, 1977).

Women found ways to use "women's work" as their primary outlet for expression. Basic needlework skills were learned at home and samplers were among the first results of those lessons. A sampler dated 1640 and embroidered by Loara Standish, the daughter of Miles Standish, is recognized as the earliest needlework of its kind completed in colonial America (Dewhurst et al., 1979). Although women had been in the country for more than fifty years, their time and energy had been required for survival. Plain sewing to produce clothing, not nonutilitarian needlework, was necessary. Many surviving pieces show good taste and creative vitality even though the early needleworker made no conscious effort to produce a work of art. Sewing was done to fill an urgent necessity, not as a release for artistic expression (Peto, 1939).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before the industrial revolution, life revolved around the home. The hearth and the bed were two important features of the home and both were linked to needlework. The hearth was the place where the woman of the house spent a great deal of time preparing food, making soap, candles, and medicine and performing numerous other tasks. It was also by the light of the fire that she supervised the children's

lessons or entertained guests while she sewed, thus producing documents which revealed her character, temperament, and activities (Peto, 1939).

The bed, as well as the hearth, was an important focus in the colonial home. Spruill (1938) wrote that "the bed...was found in every room except possibly the kitchen...and was the most expensive and luxurious object on display in many homes" (pp. 23-24). The bed, therefore, was adorned with one of the few decorative needlework items in the house. Household inventories included lists of embroidered quilts, crewel-worked bed hangings, coverlets, and bed rugs. Bed rugs, crafted by simple stitching techniques, made warm, beautiful bed coverings. They were completed by older women, sometimes as long as twenty-five years after their marriage, using the materials at hand to express their creativity (Keyes, 1927). Other embroidered bed coverings and hangings were created by colonial women to protect from drafts, to provide privacy, and to furnish evidence of the family's social and economic status (Dewhurst et al., 1979).

> There was no provision in the family budget for bedcoverings and no shop in which to purchase them if there had been; it was woman's job to spin and weave, save scraps and sew. To embellish her handwork was her privilege, providing it did not take up too much time required for more useful tasks. (Peto, 1939, p. xiv)

Children were an asset to women because they could lighten the work load. Among the chores that children were taught early was textile production. Teaching was accomplished by the mother in combination with other chores which confined her to the hearth and home. Much of the work was done by young girls and enabled them to make an economic contribution to the family as well as obey both the law and religious dictates which required that children "be set to some...employment" (Earle, 1943, p. 305).

In early colonial years, education was considered necessary in order for the church and the state to flourish, although young girls received an education that was distinctly different from that of young boys. For women to meet educational requirements, they had only to learn to

read the Bible and to do enough arithmetic to be able to keep the household accounts. "If we could count our beaux and our skeins of yarn, it was sufficient" (Emery, 1879, p. 49). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was consistently agreed that "no matter what other skills or knowledge a woman strove to attain, skill in needlework was of first priority" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, pp. 12-13).

Needlework skills were first learned at home and samplers were among the first pieces of work that were produced. Although the earliest samplers were made for reference use, later versions included examples of embroidered letters, design motifs, verses, pictures, and occasionally names of family members and significant dates. Frequently these samplers provided the only form of visual expression for women of the time. Samplers were part of the socialization process because they "served as examples of newly mastered stitches or as badges of readiness for womanhood" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, p. 20) for women of all social classes. Women who could afford to have their portraits painted often chose to be depicted with their needlework. Prominent women such as Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and other famous colonial women were known to be skilled needleworkers. Although training in the skills needed for executing samplers as well as public and private endorsement of this activity were readily available, women usually completed only one sampler as young girls before they were besieged by the responsibilities of womanhood (Eberlin & McClure, 1927). The potential for expression in this medium was minimally pursued. Fratto (1973) suggests that because samplers were an integral part of the socialization process for young women and because samplers were judged on their conformity, restraint, and sentimentality, the creativity of the sampler makers was inhibited.

Women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found ways to use the materials at hand to express themselves creatively and masterfully. Examination of their needlework reveals the "integral nature of creative sewing in the life of colonial women" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, p. 30). An embroidered panorama titled "First, Second and Last Scene of Mortality"

completed by Prudence Punderson Rossiter in Preston, Connecticut, sometime before 1783, the year before her marriage to Dr. Timothy Wells Rossiter, provides a picture of the eighteenth century woman. In the first scene, a servant woman is rocking a cradle. In the center scene, a young woman is working on her embroidery. In the third scene, a table is holding a coffin with the initials PP on top to represent the final stage of the woman's life (Dewhurst et al., 1979).

Changes in thinking about women affected the role of needlework in the lives of nineteenth century women. Creation of the leisure class and the spread of industrialization resulted in attention being given to the definition of proper role in life for women. Views about character and conduct shaped the way women could express themselves. From all directions women heard and read about the qualities of the ideal woman required by the "cult of true womanhood". More than ever the domestic sphere was described as the proper place for women. For the most part women "willingly accepted or unknowingly absorbed the ideals set before them" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, p. 42) and used needlework, which was already associated with the domestic sphere, as their medium of expression. In her Letters to Young Ladies Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1837) advised women that "needlework, in all its forms of use, elegance, and adornment, has ever been the appropriate occupation of women" (p. 25). Needlework and accessories such as sewing boxes, thimbles, and needleholders played an important role in the lives of nineteenth century women.

Women combined traditional tools and skills, available materials, and the needs of their families with their desire to express themselves. Of all the needlework practiced in America in the nineteenth century, quilt making was the most universal. Pieced quilts were produced to provide extra warmth and were often made of small pieces of cloth which came from remnants of the clothing of family and friends. Intricate patterns were formed by cutting the fabric into shapes and sewing them together to create geometric designs. After the quilt top was completed, it was joined with a batting and a backing by tiny quilting stitches. The quilting added to the individuality of the design. The elaborate quilted patterns displayed some of the

emotional enthusiasm the maker may have been denied in other areas of her life (Fox, 1985). One woman remarked, "I would have lost my mind if I had not had my quilts to do" (Mainardi, 1973, p. 59).

Sometimes the entire quilt was completed by one unaided person. Frequently, however, women joined together in a quilting bee. Visiting just for social intercourse was not tolerated, but groups of women could justify gathering themselves around a quilting frame.

> I've always belonged to some quiltin' club or church bee. When I was raising my kids, the club was always my time to get off and get some relief. I ain't happy doin' nothin'. But if I can take my relaxation with a needle and have some fun talkin', then I think it's all right. (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 103)

The event allowed the women not only to complete the quilt, but also to exchange a wide range of information. They were able to discuss issues of common concern and to consider social and political issues. Susan B. Anthony's first public demand for equal rights was raised at a quilting bee. Quilting bees were opportunities for mutual support among the women who shared the rituals of both grief and celebration. Women also recognized and rewarded quilting skills. Quilts which showed exceptional skill were carefully kept and became family heirlooms (Fox, 1985; Ickis, 1949; Lippard, 1983; Mainardi, 1973; Showalter, 1986; Spruill, 1938).

Girls were taught quilting skills at an early age and were encouraged to finish their first quilt by the age of five. Young girls learned patchwork by doing a daily stint. Instruction often began at quilting bees. Tradition required every young woman to create thirteen quilts by the time she was married. Twelve of the quilts she made by herself. The thirteenth quilt was the most elaborate and was named the Engagement or Bride's quilt. The young woman and her friends joined together to complete the stitching. All who helped with the quilt signed it. When only the last row of quilting remained, the married women stepped away to allow the single girls to finish. Tradition said that the one to sew the last stitch would be the next to marry. The quilting bee was an important social event of the nineteenth century as documented by its

representation in songs, stories, and pictures of the day (Dewhurst et al., 1979; Ferrero, 1987; Ickis, 1949; Mainardi, 1973; Munro, 1983; Showalter, 1986).

Mothers saw to it that sons had their quilts, too. These were called the Freedom Quilts and marked the celebration of a son's twentieth-first birthday when he no longer worked for his parents but began to work for himself. The young man's lady friends made the blocks for the quilt and later quilted it at quilting bee festivities (Lane, 1963).

Quilt making was often an occasion for women to release frustrations. Chase (1976) observed that "a woman made utility quilts as fast as she could so her family wouldn't freeze, and she made them as beautiful as she could so her heart wouldn't break" (p. 9). Women sewed their thoughts and feelings into their quilts. A great grandmother reminisced about a quilt she made while her family was growing up:

> It took me more than twenty years, nearly twenty-five, I reckon, in the evening after supper when the children were all put to bed. My whole life is in that quilt. It scares me sometimes when I look at it. All my joys and all my sorrows are stitched into those little pieces. When I was proud of the boys and when I was down-right provoked and angry with them. When the girls annoyed me or when they gave me a warm feeling around my heart. And John too. He was stitched into that quilt and all the thirty years we were married. Sometimes I loved him and sometimes I sat there hating him as I pieced the patches together. So they are all in that quilt, my hopes, and fears, my joys and sorrows, my loves and hates. I tremble sometimes when I remember what that quilt knows about me. (Ickis, 1949, p. 270)

Another woman said,

> How much piecin' a quilt's like livin' a life...The Lord sends us the pieces, but we can cut 'em out and put 'em together pretty much to suit ourselves, and there's a heap more in the cuttin' out and the sewin' than there is in the caliker. The same sort o' things comes into all lives, jest as the Apostle says, "There hath no trouble taken you but is common to all men." (Hall, 1908, pp. 74-75)

Cooper and Buferd (1977) recorded another woman's philosophy:

> You can't always change things. Sometimes you don't have no control over the way things go. Hail ruins the crops, or fire burns you out. And then you're just given so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you got. That's what piecing

> is. The materials is passed on to you or is all you can afford to buy...that's just what's given to you. Your fate. But the way you put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like. (p. 20)

Since most women were without worldly power, they created domestic projects with a metaphoric relationship to their lives. This kind of quilt was not made for use but was stored as a legend of one's existence.

American history can be traced in the patterns and fabrics of quilts. Annual economic conditions can be understood by examining the types of fabrics used in a single quilt. Good years were exemplified by the use of French challis or London broadcloth. In contrast, lean years led to the use of coarse calico or sacking dyed with homemade dyes. Quilts were the family records. Squares were made of a collection of fabrics taken from wedding dresses, christening gowns, military uniforms, best clothing of favorite relatives or deceased family members (Dewhurst et al., 1979; Fox, 1985; Showalter, 1986).

An important part of the myth of the ideal woman was the belief that she was better suited to mourning for the dead "for feminine minds and hearts were occupied with stern and sorrowful things" (Peto, 1939, p. xiv). Women turned to needlework for relief from grief. They embroidered elaborate mourning pictures as memorials for deceased heros or loved ones. Mourning pictures first appeared after the death of George Washington in 1799 (Chicago, 1979). By the nineteenth century most of the mourning pictures were the work of school girls who were learning the sewing skills which were deemed necessary for their entrance into polite society. The decline of the death rate led to more attention to mourning practices. This preoccupation with death often encouraged school girls to create mourning pictures commemorating heroic figures or deceased relatives that they might not even know. By 1840, when schools placed greater emphasis on serious study, less concern was given to stitched mourning pictures which had also served the purpose of recording family statistics. By the

middle of the century when the romantic era ended, the making of mourning pictures ended also (Chicago, 1979; Dewhurst et al., 1979).

During the nineteenth century, many eastern American women left a relatively comfortable way of life and went westward in search of the promised land taking with them selections from their most valuable possessions. Among the potpourri were prized "bits of needlework" and "spare quilts" (Cummins, 1914, p. 54). As in early colonial America, pioneer women were valued for their ability to contribute to the struggle for survival, but many of the women carried with them the cultural values of the east and experienced unaccustomed loneliness and hard times (Stratton, 1981, chap. 3). Often women longed to practice "feminine occupations" (Ferrero, 1987, p. 55). Sewing was a reassurance of their civilized female identity. One pioneer woman said,

> I think the most unhappy period of my life was the first year spent on Clatsop, simply for the want of something to do. I had no yarn to knit, nothing to sew, not even rags to make patches...One day Mrs. Parrish gave me a sack full of rags and I never received a present before nor since that I so highly appreciated as I did those rags. (Vuolo, 1975, p. 34)

The women lived in primitive surroundings, did all the household chores, raised a family and found time and energy to decorate their homes and promote their psychic survival with the products of needlework.

> Mama's best quilts were her dugout quilts because that was when she really needed something pretty...she could get real soothed...with the needlework at night sitting by the lamp...The Butterfly was free and fragile. It was the prettiest thing she could think of. She knew I was coming and the Butterfly was for me. (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 24)

Important events of history and family life were recorded in the quilts and embroideries the women executed during their trailblazing experience. The names that pioneer women gave their designs were significant. They gave new names to traditional patterns as well as creating new compositions which structurally, pictorially, or merely by name, "reflected the hardships

through which families passed in the epic experiences of making a new home in a new land" (Peto, 1939, p. xv).

Early in the nineteenth century women in less primitive settings often chose to stitch subjects taken from biblical or literary topics. Subsequently their interest turned to environmental scenes. Late in the century, women became interested in issues such as slavery and suffrage and recorded their sentiments in needlework. Quilts contained references to political and social events both in the design motifs and the names assigned to them. Near the end of the century, their regard for issues led many women to leave the domestic sphere to join the work force and humanitarian movements. The spirit of support that women had learned in their quilting bees continued as women became a part of a different arena.

As the twentieth century began, women continued to leave their places in homes and move into communities and factories. Since women had traditionally been associated with the production of textiles, they often found themselves employed in textile factories where they worked long hours in unfavorable conditions. Under these circumstances, creative needlework production at home was reduced. Personal expression gave way to more pragmatic sewing.

> In the beginning of the century, sewing was something that one did because one had to. Some of it was decorative and enjoyable, and some just drudgery. But the drudgery became obvious only in the second half of the century, when new products and new inventions convinced women that they could either shorten the time it took to do dull tasks or...avoid them altogether. (Vincent, 1988, p. 119)

Needlework kits with stamped embroidery patterns were common. Instruction books and magazines with guidelines for needleworking became popular. Interest in needlework turned to projects which could be completed by working women. The publication of magazines such as The Ladies Home Journal and Godey's Lady's Book provided the opportunity for women to exchange advice and seek support for their mutual interest in needlework. The support continued as women were able to move into a more visible societal and professional sphere.

The role of needlework in women's lives changed as their role in society changed. "The young girls still appreciate needlework, although they don't gather in clubs much the way we used to" (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 103). As women occupied professional spheres while maintaining their domestic spheres, they found that needlework filled both their need for expression and their lack of time for uninterrupted concentration.

> There are several genres of women's work, quilts and blankets for example, which are an assemblage of fragments pieced together whenever there is time...Certainly the quality of time in a woman's life, particularly if she is not involved in the career thrust toward fame and fortune, is distinct from the quality of time experienced by men and women who are caught up in the "progress" of a career...Women's tasks in the home are equally varied and open-ended...The Assemblage [sic] of fragments, the organization of forms in a complex matrix suggests depth and intensity as an alternative to progress. (deBretteville, 1974, pp. 117-118)

Women's lives required organizational skills to allow them to cope with the diversity of their responsibilities. Eliza Calvert Hall (1908) in Aunt Jane of Kentucky explained,

> How much piecin' a quilt is like livin' a life! You can give the same kind of pieces to two persons, and one will make a "nine-patch" and one'll make a "wild goose chase," and there will be two quilts made out of the same kind of pieces, and jest as different as they can be. And that is jest the way with livin'. (p. 74)

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, woman's position began to change as a new ideal woman was created. Instead of career women, new modern homemakers began to emerge. Needleworking regained endorsement because it reflected a focus on the home.

During the Depression years, women turned individually and in groups to needlework to pass time and to share social support. Quilting bees regained popularity and backing. Quilts produced during this time became important documents of life. Technological developments in textiles and dyes as well as the widespread publication of newspaper articles supporting quilt making and exhibition gave importance to needleworking as a legitimate medium of expression. The vast numbers of women involved in needleworking contributed to its recognition and

support from federal arts programs as well as recognition of the relationship between folk tradition and fine art in America.

In the following decades, interest in needlework waxed and waned but returned to fashion in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the "apron strings of feminism" (Schapiro, 1983, p. 33). What had been women's work became a "new artistic inspiration and self-validation" (Hedges, 1991, p. 338). In the 1970s, participants in the Women's Movement chose the use of needlework as a "truly indigenous art form...to celebrate a contemporary phenomenon" (Robinson, 1983, p. 10). By highlighting a form of art reserved, for the most part, exclusively for women, Women's Movement proponents could make a statement about their identities governed by both masculine and feminine principles and shaped by their cultural conditioning while acknowledging the connection of contemporary women with women of the past (Robinson, 1983). The quilt became a prime visual metaphor for women's lives and for women's culture (Schapiro, 1983).

In the 1980s and the 1990s, needlework continued to gain favor among women as they used it both as a personal and public narrative of their responses to social, economic, and political developments. Through their needlework, women attempted to recover from the traumas of Watergate and Vietnam and to later become active agents in the recognition of the AIDS epidemic as well as other social and economic causes.

Publications about Needlework

Although needlework survives from about 500 BC, it was not until early in the twentieth century that textile scholarship began to receive serious attention. Prior to that time publications that considered needlework took other paths. Needlework is mentioned in "The Miller's Tale" from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in sixteenth century inventory lists, and in pattern books dating from 1527. One pattern book, first published in 1621, was popular enough for twelve editions to be printed. A Scholehouse for the Needle published in 1632 promised to teach "by sundry sortes of patterns and examples of different kinds, how to compose many

faire workes" (Christie, 1909, p. 66). Some early pattern books contained pictures of ladies working at embroidery frames. Others contained poems which named stitches then in use and the country of origin for the patterns listed in the book (Christie, 1909; Evans, 1994).

About the middle of the nineteenth century, there were several comprehensive manuals or handbooks for needlework published. The books were made available to the Victorian women who were encouraged to pursue needlework in their leisure time. In Philadelphia in 1838 the first American women's magazine, Godey's Lady's Book, was published. It was a sourcebook of style for both home and wardrobe. It also provided ideas, patterns, and instructions for fancywork with which a woman of the time was expected to decorate herself and her house. Near the end of the century some books were written which encouraged American women to make their needlework an artistic endeavor.

Around the turn of the twentieth century interest swung to the development of home industries. Books were written to teach women how to "apply themselves to economically rewarding, aesthetically effective endeavors" (Gordon, 1979, p. 23). Articles regarding the economic value of needlework were written (Binns, 1908; Daingerfield, 1908). Other authors urged needleworkers "not to forget that the main object of all Embroidery [sic] is to give pleasure in some way, to charm the eye or to delight the mind...and to deal with nothing but what is of beauty and interest" (Christie, 1909, p. 2). To this end books and articles connected with the study of stitches, materials, methods of work, designing, and history of needlework were written.

Research Related to Needlework

The twentieth century also marked the beginning of earnest scholarly study of needlework. A research-minded organization, the Needle and Bobbin Club, began to publish articles devoted to textile study in its Bulletin in 1916. Needlewomen and quilters began to take an interest in recording the history of their art in the 1920s. In 1921 Candice Wheeler wrote The Development of Embroidery in America. It was the first comprehensive historical look at

American needlework and first introduced the attitude that needlework could be read for clues about women's frame of mind. Bolton and Coe (1921) wrote a comprehensive book on American samplers and Antiques magazine began publication with scholarly articles concerning textiles in 1921. Ruth Finley (1929) focused on quilts and the women who made them. In Mountain Homespun Goodrich (1931) spotlighted women weavers. Hall and Kretsinger wrote The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in 1935. Eaton (1937) considered Southern Highland crafters and their work. Harbeson published American Needlework: The History of Decorative Stitchery from the Late 16th to the 20th Century in 1938. Other books and articles were published which tried to analyze embroidery and define it aesthetically. An interest in women's lives as well as their art produced work like Julia Cherry Spruill's Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies in 1938. Peto's (1939) Historic Quilts concerned American-made patchwork quilts and their background stories.

The 1940s brought an extension of publications which were human interest oriented. William Dunton continued the tradition of writing about women by writing about quilts in his 1946 book, Old Quilts. Technological developments produced new synthetic fibers which created interest and encouraged inquiry into the relationship between people and fibers.

Books of the 1950s, such as Gift from the Hills (Blythe, 1958), were important because they indicated the appreciation of needlework as an expressive art form. This attitude toward needlework continued into the sixties as new artists working in fiber wrote of embroidery as an art form. Artists drew on traditional embroidery sources for inspiration and technique.

The women's movement of the 1970s and the Bicentennial celebration of 1976 both, in different ways, gave further stimulus to careful scholarly investigations into the history and nature of needlework. Needlework as labor that had occupied a good part of women's lives from the first years of colonial settlement became the focus of study. The folklore locus was present in some sources, but there was also scholarly interest on the part of sociologists, art historians, and feminists (Gordon, 1979). They began to examine the properties of specific

techniques and working with them in new ways. Artists such as Judy Chicago (1979) chose techniques traditionally associated with women to relate women's history and contributions to culture; "to aggrandize women through the varieties of needlework women have traditionally used" (p. 15). Literary critics examined quilts as "products of a universal woman's creativity... an interpretative sign of the stories of the American population" (Baker & Pierce-Baker, 1985, p. 714). Women writers such as Elaine Hedges, Joyce Carol Oates, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker began to use quilt imagery in their poems and novels as one way of creating a common language (Aptheker, 1989; Cahill, 1994; Showalter, 1991).

Recent Quantitative Research

In spite of the scope of interest and inquiry into needlework and the lives of women who created it, there is a gap in the body of knowledge in the language of the women themselves. Within the needlework industry, business leaders have begun to gather information as a result of "hundreds of letters over the years from women telling us in an informal way that crafting made them feel better" (Clapper, 1993, news release). The decision that "it was time to scientifically get some numbers" (Clapper, 1993, news release) resulted in the commissioning of an independent research firm which began survey research in October 1990 and completed its study in January 1991. The survey, mailed to five hundred randomly selected crafters, had a completion rate of 72%. The information gathered from the research provided a profile of crafters including key demographic characteristics (Readex, 1991). When asked, "Which of the following do you believe has been a result of your involvement with crafting," the respondents said the following:

66% feel happier,
65% feel more relaxed,
54% feel less stressed out,
39% spend less time thinking about themselves and their problems,
37% spend less time worrying,
23% feel more energetic,
16% believe their blood pressure is lower,
16% sleep better, and
9% have fewer aches and pains. (Clapper, 1993)

This research indicated that in the late twentieth century when sewing is more a matter of personal choice than a social accommodation, women subscribe to it as a primary outlet for expression and a source of satisfaction for their personal, intellectual, and creative needs. The data assembled from this inquiry can be useful for "women facing a lot of stress in her [sic] life, for the woman with specific physical problems, for institutions such as hospitals looking for new ways to help...for women who want to be healthier through crafting" (Clapper, 1993, news release).

In 1995 the American Home Sewing and Craft Association (AHSCA) commissioned a stress expert to compare the effects of sewing and other leisure activities requiring similar hand and eye movements on the physiology of the human body. These activities included sewing, playing cards, playing a hand-held computer game, painting at an easel, and reading the newspaper. A biofeedback method measured thirty female subjects, age 20 to 51--fifteen experienced skilled sewers and fifteen novices. The physiological measures taken were systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, heart rate, peripheral skin temperature, and galvanic skin resistance; all generally accepted measures of physiological arousal or stress. Data were analyzed using a separate ANOVA for each measure of stress. Significant findings (95% confidence level) resulted in two areas: reduction in heart rate and reduction in blood pressure--two key factors in the measurement of stress. These reductions occurred while the women were sewing and were significantly lower than when they were engaged in other activities. Both groups of women, the skilled and the unskilled sewers, experienced decreases in heart rate and blood pressure (Swartzberg, 1995).

An executive summary released by PT & Co. reported,

> The study scientifically validated anecdotal evidence that sewing helps women, whether they are skilled or novices, to relax while they focus on a creative activity, and that sewing may now be added to the group of "stress-reducing" activities. (Reiner, 1995)

Summary

Although recorded oral histories and quantitative investigations contributed substantial information to the body of knowledge, a gap remained. There was a need to corroborate the findings within the lived experiences of the women. Additional data in the voice of women would enhance and expand existing knowledge. Missing was inquiry into the meaning of needlework in the daily lives of ordinary women. Recorded oral histories for the most part had professed to inquire into the meaning of needlework to women but had instead focused on their needleworking techniques and skills. The results of quantitative studies provided experimental evidence to support the anecdotal evidence that sewing helps women. Employing the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology of this research added the dimension of the women's interpretations to the exploration into the meaning of needlework to ordinary women.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to look beyond the ways that women do needlework and consider the meaning of needlework to women. Many researchers have raised questions about what it means to study human beings in their own environment and what methodology is best fitted for this kind of study. The phenomenological perspective permits reflection upon the individual against the background of others.

> Certain classes of problems and concerns...are particularly well suited to a...hermeneutic approach. These include questions aimed at (a) understanding the relationship and significance of complex human interactions and events in the context of their everyday settings, and (b) understanding the relationship between behaviors, practices, or events and the socio-cultural, historical, political, and economic background against which they take place. (Addison, 1992, p. 112)

The hermeneutic phenomenologist examines the parts and reintegrates them into the whole. Phenomenology attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday events. It recognizes that defining is not understanding. Phenomenolgy expresses reality as it is constructed in the consciousness of the participants. It is composed of reflections of both the researcher and the researched.

Philosophy of Qualitative Research

In qualitative research the primary objective is to understand the meaning of an experience. While quantitative research takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts which become variables, qualitative research endeavors to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1988).

> It is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interaction there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting--what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's

> going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting--and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting...The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Patton, 1985, p. 1)

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities. It examines phenomena to interpret rather than to measure. Beliefs form the basis of perception. This type of research is exploratory and inductive and emphasizes processes rather than ends.

> In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment. What one *does* do is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring. (Merriam, 1988, p. 17)

Qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with process rather than outcomes or products. Qualitative researchers are also interested in meanings which they assume are a part of people's experiences (Lather, 1986). The researcher has a very important position in qualitative research. "The researcher is the *primary instrument* for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1988, p. 19). The researcher is responsive to the context, can adapt techniques to the circumstances, can consider the whole context, and is sensitive to nonverbal aspects of the research. The human instrument can process data immediately, clarify and summarize as the study evolves (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lather, 1986).

The researcher in the hermeneutic interview must remain focused on the research question--the meaning of the phenomenon. She must keep both herself and the interviewees oriented to the substance of the entity being considered by the types of questions she chooses. The interviewees become the co-investigators in the study. They begin to care about the subject and the research question. By setting up "collaborative hermeneutic conversations" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99), the researcher can involve the participants in reflection of the transcripts of their texts. This process helps to bring the significance of the phenomenological question into view.

In qualitative research one is interested in process, meaning and understanding. Words or pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned; therefore, qualitative research is descriptive. Qualitative research is largely inductive. This type of research "builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories, rather than testing existing theory. Inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Pattern theories are suited to qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because "we understand something by identifying it as a specific part in an organized whole" (Kaplan, 1964, p. 333). Pattern theory can be indefinitely filled in and extended. As the researcher obtains more and more knowledge, it falls into place in the pattern, and the pattern helps to constitute the larger whole (Kaplan, 1964; Lather, 1986).

Substantive theory is restricted to particular settings, groups, times, populations, or problems. This level of theory is closely related to real-life situations. It derives from practice and is suitable for practical situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lather, 1986). Qualitative study builds rather than tests theory.

Data conveyed through words have been labeled qualitative while quantitative data are presented in numbers. Qualitative data consist of detailed descriptions and direct quotations which provide raw data for study. "These [descriptions] are subjective while numbers are objective, and there are those who would rather not know the truths and names to them" (Statham, Miller, & Mauksch, 1988, p. x). "The commitment to get close, to be factual, descriptive and quotive, constitutes a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms" (Patton, 1980, p. 36-37). It is the researcher's job to find out what is central to the people being observed.

Both qualitative and quantitative data are interpretations of experience (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research relies on data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Quantitative data from surveys or other instruments can be used to support findings from

qualitative data (Merriam, 1988). The use of multiple methods of collecting data is one form of what Denzin (1970, p. 301) calls triangulation. Methodological triangulation combines dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit. "The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1970, p. 308).

Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data. The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. Patton (1980) explains that researchers interview people "to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...feelings, thoughts, intentions, the meanings they have attached to what goes on in the world. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 196). The decision to use interviewing as the primary mode of data collection should be based on the kind of information needed and whether interviewing is the best way to get it. In qualitative studies interviewing is open-ended and less structured because the researcher assumes that individual participants define the world in unique ways. These interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the participant, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1988). One of the goals of the less structured interview is to learn enough about a situation to devise questions for succeeding interviews.

Unstructured or open-ended interviewing demands flexibility from the researcher. "A good interviewer refrains from arguing, is sensitive to the verbal and nonverbal messages being conveyed, and is a good reflective listener" (Merriam, 1988, p. 75).

A good participant is one who can express thoughts, feelings, opinions, and his or her perspective on the topic being discussed. Selecting participants on the basis of what they can contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being studied is important. In

this type of research, the crucial factor is not the number of participants but rather the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). Patton (1980) suggests that the interviewer assume that the participant has something to contribute, has had an experience worth talking about, and has an opinion of interest to the interviewer.

The value of an interview depends on the interviewer's knowing enough about the topic to ask meaningful questions in language easily understood by the participant. Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, & Sabshin (1981) offer four types of questions. The hypothetical question asks what the participant might do or what it might be like in a particular situation. The devil's advocate question challenges the participant to consider an opposing view. The ideal position question asks the participant to describe an ideal situation. The interpretive question advances tentative interpretation of what the participant has been saying and asks for a reaction. Leading questions should be avoided because they set the participant up to accept the researcher's point of view. "The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (Oakley, 1981, p. 41). The lines of inquiry of any particular study plus the discoveries and dialogue within data collection, interpretive analysis, and writing comprise the progression of the design of the study.

It is important to assess the quality of the data obtained. Factors such as the participant's health or mood at the time of the interview may affect the quality of data obtained. All information obtained from a participant has been selected, either consciously or unconsciously, from all that she knows. What the researcher gets in an interview is the participant's perception. It is a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as they are remembered and invented. This personal perception is what is sought in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988).

Several levels of data analysis are possible in qualitative research. Raw data need to be organized in some way. Data can be arranged chronologically, topically, or in descriptive narrative. A more abstract level of analysis involves developing a process of systematically classifying data into schema consisting of categories, themes, or other taxonomic classes that interpret the meaning of data. A third level of analysis involves explaining a large number of phenomena, making inferences, and developing theory (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Determination and explication of meaning is the difficult task involved in "reflecting appropriately, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning in the lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). Phenomenological themes may be understood as the "structures of experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). When we analyze a phenomenon, we try to determine what the themes are, and the experiential structures that make up the experience. Themes give control and order to our research and writing (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is thought to derive from Hermes, the Greek messenger god, who carried messages from the gods to the people. His role was to interpret these messages from the gods and to make them understandable to humans. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a hermeneutic approach for studying the human sciences began to gain prominence. Trying to understand, take meaning from, or make intelligible that which is not yet understood is the central task of hermeneutics (Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons as individuals against the background of an understanding of "the logos of other, the whole, the communal, or the social" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). It promotes communication about the meaning of human life, possible ways of living, norms of interpersonal relations, political and social goals, and various other concerns about the conduct of life. Hermeneutic experience is dialogical. Knowledge is produced in interpretative research when understanding and agreement are increased. Hermeneutic analysis is a circular procedure (Addison, 1992). Meaning and

interpretation of both the researcher and the participants are respected (Brown, 1989). The researcher acknowledges that her own knowing is not enough. Analysis is carefully linked to the "claims-making of others" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 258).

Some people see human life as something that can be depicted in stories while others regard stories as ideals that people should try to live up to. Common to both is the presupposition that life and story can be distinguished from one another in such a way that they can be described independently. An alternative approach, which is part of hermeneutics, starts from the idea that life and story are "internally related" (Widdershoven, 1993, p. 2). From a hermeneutic point of view, human life is interpreted in stories. Following Merleau-Pony we can characterize the hermeneutic relationship between life and story. Life has an implicit meaning that is made explicit in stories. Belief in this process presupposes that something is present, but it is not there just to be uncovered. It is shaped and structured in the process of articulation (Flax, 1987; Hartsock, 1986; Widdershoven, 1993).

van Manen (1990) points out that "anecdotes can teach us" (p. 120). Anecdotal narratives are important in that they function as experimental case material on which reflection is possible. The stories make it possible "to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while inviting us into a reflective stance vis-a-vis the meanings embedded in the experience" (p. 121). The anecdotal narrative is powerful in its ability

(1) to compel: a story recruits our willing attention;
(2) to lead us to reflect: a story tends to invite us to a reflective search for significance;
(3) to involve us personally: one tends to search actively for the story teller's meaning via one's own;
(4) to transform: we may be touched, shaken, moved by story; it teaches us;
(5) to measure one's interpretive sense: one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretive sense. (van Manen, 1990, p. 121)

"When unarticulated, taken-for-granted practices and meanings fade from...the social fabric of our lives, and we lose what they enable us to see, create and represent" (Benner, 1994, p. xv).

Christ (1980) wrote that without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories [woman] cannot understand herself.

While interpretive studies have some similarities, each is uniquely shaped by the questions asked and the responses given by the participants. The resemblance is not based on "uniformly trying to get structures, processes, or functions of human capacities explained or described in the same ways. The similarities come from a shared understanding. Because meanings are shared, one can also select and describe paradigm cases" (Dreyfus, 1994, pp. vii, x).

The terms interpretative and hermeneutical are used interchangeably. The task of hermeneutic analysis is to bring a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding (Addison, 1992).

By engaging in the interpretative process, the researcher tries to understand the world of concerns, habits, and skills presented by the participants' narratives and actions. These understandings are then used to contrast similarities and differences from other participants' narratives. Understanding human concerns, meanings, experiential learning, and practical everyday skillful comportment is the goal as opposed to explanation or prediction through causal laws and formal theoretical propositions. The understanding sought in interpretative phenomenology considers historical change, transformations, gains, losses, temporality, and context (Benner, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

Research Design

As the sole proprietor of a needlework shop, my interest in the meaning of needlework to prospective customers began as a marketing strategy. Successful entrepreneurs want to know what their customers are buying, when they are buying, and the reason for their purchases. Retailing today calls for a new interpretation of the Golden Rule. Instead of the time-honored dictum, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the effective entrepreneur treats

others as *they* want to be treated. Relationship marketing requires the business person to know what the individual customer wants and needs by collecting information on each customer (Anacona, 1994a). The retailer must become a curious person to determine how her customers want to be treated. Research by Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, and White (1988), Lather (1986), and Patton (1990) illustrates that one of the most effective ways to learn what is happening in a particular place is to go to that place and ask the people who are there.

During the twelve years that I owned a needlework shop, I observed that customers appeared to select and purchase needlework supplies for a variety of reasons. There were the browsers who came regularly to look; the browsers who occasionally made small purchases; and the customers who seemed to come with a purpose--a mission. They methodically shopped for all the supplies they needed to complete a project. As time passed, I became curious to learn what drove the people in the third group to perform the shopping routine which in some cases appeared to be a ritual.

I was first attracted by the emergency room nurse who came every two weeks and carefully selected her project supplies. She said, "I don't spend my money on anything else. This is my therapy." I listened as others told me their reasons for doing needlework. A fifteen-year-old young man insisted that I teach him how to cross-stitch so that he could write with needle and thread a message to his doctor about his determination to defeat his leukemia. There was the wife who had one morning a month free from the care of her terminally-ill husband, and she chose to spend her time in my shop; a competitive business man who was trying to come to terms with enforced leisure that a serious heart attack had brought; a young man attempting to deal with a divorce and the responsibility of custody of his two-year-old daughter; the grandmother with a brain tumor whose goal was to cross-stitch something for each of her grandchildren before she died. There was the deputy sheriff who sought relief from the stress of his work by designing and stitching delicate work; the traveling salesman who

found consolation from the loneliness of being "on the road" by stitching complicated designs as gifts for his family; the hospital administrator, who reacquainted herself with prior needlework skills when her husband deserted her due to his inability to handle her professional success; the obese woman who used needlework as her substitute for eating as she struggled with a life-threatening weight problem. The anecdotal evidence continued to accumulate.

I was not alone in my observation of the influence of needlework on people in distress. Ginnie Thompson (personal communication, March 31, 1994) wrote

> In the seventies and eighties I had large boxes of letters from counted cross-stitchers. Most of the correspondents thought of cross-stitch as an enjoyable pastime, but a percentage of the stitchers used cross-stitch to help them survive tragedies and these were heart rending.

These stories led me from an interest in the meaning of needlework to customers as a marketing strategy to a human science question: What is the meaning of needlework to anonymous women--ordinary women living their daily lives? This question became the focus of this phenomenological inquiry.

The method of inquiry must fit the problem and the goals of the research question. Neither surveys nor questionnaires adequately capture the complexity and richness of the everyday practices of the women as they stitch their chosen needlework projects.

> Although polls and vast statistical counts can be useful, the fact is qualitative research should be the food of policy makers and should, in turn, be fed by them. The energy to change our society's attitudes and policies toward women...has to come from strong convictions that only result from a deep understanding of people and their problems. That [was] one important role of [this] qualitative research. (Statham, Miller, Mauksch, 1988, p. ix)

I wanted to understand what the women thought they were doing, intended to do, or said they did. By examining the women's narratives, I expected to gain an insight into the role their needlework plays in the way the women conduct their daily lives.

Participants

The patrons who shopped in my needlework store comprised a diverse population. The needlework of African-American, Asian-American, and Native American women provides a rich contribution to women's history. Additionally, I suggest that some of the men and children who were my clients had a special agenda when they did needlework. The parameters of this research did not encompass these topics; they deserve study of their own. For the purposes of this study I focused on Anglo-American women. The purpose of this project was to interview some of my needlework shop customers and look for information relating to the value of needlework in their daily lives.

In enlisting participants for the study, I contacted each of the six women I was considering. All of the women were former clients of my needlework shop. My acquaintance with five of the women began on a retailer/customer basis; however, I had known them for more than ten years so we had shared many conversations on topics unrelated to needleworking. One woman had been an acquaintance of mine since I was a teenager. I had worked with each of the women on needleworking projects. From time to time I had taught one or more of them new stitches, showed them how to use new thread or fabrics, located specific patterns, adapted patterns, and helped them correct errors or understand difficult instructions. I had seen several finished projects they had done. I saw the women on regular, but unscheduled, occasions so I was current on important events in their lives as well as the status of their stitching.

Initial contact with the women was made by telephone with further communication occurring through letters, telephone conversations, and face-to-face contact. I related the nature and purpose of my intended study. I decided to interview: a married woman with one pre-adolescent and two adolescent children; a widow with adult children; a single grandmother with one child; a married great-grandmother with four adult children; a never-married, childless woman; and a divorced professional woman with one college-age child. The women ranged in age from mid-forties to mid-eighties. Their occupational status included two full-time

homemakers, a secretary, an adult caregiver, a production worker, and a school administrator. Educational levels stretched from high school dropout to postgraduate scholar. The women displayed a wide variety of skill levels in counted cross-stitch although it was not the needlework of first choice for all of them. Their needlework buying habits were individual as well: some made weekly or biweekly purchases; some shopped infrequently and made purchases on an arbitrary schedule. All were alike in their long-term interest in needlework. Although the women selected for this study were different in terms of age, educational level, lifestyle, needlework skill level, and purchasing habits, there were common threads woven throughout their stories. Each woman possessed the essential criteria of having an intense interest in needleworking. Each woman also was willing to participate in an hour-long initial interview and three follow-up interviews. Each woman was willing to commit the necessary time and work that would be involved. Each woman granted the right to audio tape the interviews and publish the data.

The interviews took place in the participants' homes or in another place of their selection on the day and time of their choosing. At the first interview I encouraged each individual to become a research participant on equal footing with me. I explained that I would share with them the specific materials from their interview which would be utilized and remove all identifying data including their names. I told the women that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. When mutual agreement was achieved, a consent form was signed.

Following Peshkin's (1988) advice, I acknowledge that in addition to our common interest in needlework, I share a unique connection with each of these women. Recognizing this subjectivity gave an added dimension to the examination of the women's stories. Kleinman and Copp (1993) suggest that the researcher examine rather than ignore her feelings and link them to the analysis of investigations. Rather than hoping emotions will go away, Kleinman and Copp (1993) suggest that the researcher use them to sharpen understanding. Coming to terms with her own ambivalence can help the researcher understand her participants. Emotion can

help to uncover areas that might have been overlooked. Recognizing the interdependence of researcher's and participant's affective and cognitive networks make qualitative research more complete. Kleinman and Copp (1993) and Peshkin (1988) recognize the need for the researcher to take account of her feelings and assess their effect on results. Peshkin (1988) notes that care must be taken to avoid becoming defensive and distorting analysis and understanding.

The dimensions of hermeneutic phenomenological method of research allowed four in-depth conversations with the six women over a twenty-one month period. The number of participants was limited to provide an opportunity to hear greater detail of both the spoken and silent stories of the women.

Methodology and Data Collection

Stephenson (1981) wrote, "Studying the past is valuable for more than just the information it provided: it can also provide insight into understanding the present" (p. 111). Before data collection began, I read recorded oral histories of the place needlework held in the lives of ordinary women throughout hundreds of years. I "heard" these women express ideas that I had heard my customers say. I was fascinated by the similarity of language, the recurring metaphors. I wanted to interview the women to gain understanding. In conducting this interpretive inquiry, my task as researcher was to look for themes "that lie concealed in unexamined events of everyday life" (Hultgren, 1989, p. 59). Phenomenological themes are uncovered upon analysis of lived experience. This research was selected to allow themes to emerge as a result of the cooperative efforts of researcher and researched to name and legitimize these women's felt experiences and perceptions as a way of knowing.

> When you have a desire to know something, you are consciously aiming toward what it is--not toward a copy of what is or a mere substitute for what is or a mere mental content, but toward *what is*. Thus in your very desire to know, there is already an anticipatory awareness, a general notion of what reality is. It is the to-be-known toward which your desire to know is directed. Will you reach the target? That will depend upon your own

> resources and what you are trying to know. In some instances you will be successful through a combination of experience, understanding and judgment. To the data of experience you will bring questions that somehow indicate what you want to know. The tension of questioning will ever so often yield to the eureka experience of insight...an understanding of how things might be, of a possible unity or relationship that you previously didn't know. (DiSanto & Steele, 1990, p. 143)

"What is the meaning of needlework to ordinary women?" was the phenomenon that this inquiry was endeavoring to understand. More specifically, the quest of this research was to clarify the meaning of the often-offered explanation: "It's my therapy!" Although I prepared myself with background knowledge, my role as researcher was to allow the women to do most of the talking.

I scheduled four one-hour interviews with each woman. In all but one of the cases, the interviews took place within the women's homes and were prefaced by a tour during which the women showed me completed needlework projects, old family photographs, or memorabilia and filled me in on the events of their lives. During the interviews I asked similar, although not identical, questions of each participant. Generally the questions followed this format:

1. When did you first begin to do needlework?
2. When do you work on needlework?
3. How do you feel as you work?
4. What are you working on now?
5. Why is needlework important to you?
6. Why does cross-stitch appeal to you?
7. How do you choose your projects?
8. How would your life be different if you could not do cross-stitch anymore?
9. How would you describe yourself?

For a more detailed listing of questions refer to Appendix B.

Most of the women were eager to talk although some began more slowly than others. As they related their stories, their awareness of the tape recorder soon moved into the

background and was replaced by recollections of their needlework. Following the first and third interviews, I typed verbatim transcripts of the audio-recorded conversations. During the second and fourth interviews, I gave participants the opportunity to amend their stories. The women and I examined their responses for the presence of patterns, themes, commonalities, and uniqueness. Cole (1986) contends that addressing commonalities without dealing with differences distorts that which separates as well as that which binds women. Each woman was excited with the knowledge that she could have a part in the interpretation of her story. "When I look at the finished version of this, I'll say, 'Look at that. That's me!'"

Analysis

After collecting the taped interviews, I played and replayed them so I could hear the women's voices and visualize their faces as they responded to my questions. Audiotapes add the nuances of a person's voice to the words that print provides. I had been surprised at the emotion that the women displayed when responding to my queries about what they would do if they found themselves no longer able to do needlework. I needed to remember the facial expressions that added emphasis to their comments.

When I had listened to each tape at least twice, I began the transcription process. Audiotapes allow for analysis through repeated studying, as well as checking against transcripts about the same events. Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best data base for analysis. Because I was so familiar by now with what the person had said, I could record whole phrases at a time making the physical process less laborious than I had feared. Transcribing interviews helps to recall the experience, expands the details, and often provides a fresh perspective on the material (Ely, 1994). The fact that I did not tire of hearing the women's answers made the work less tedious. Each participant was given a copy of the transcription of our interview. The copies were returned to me with only minor changes which did not alter the original message.

After the words were transformed into writing, I read the transcripts looking for responses that used the same or similar words and listed them. I also looked for ideas, concepts, and word pictures and recorded them. By searching these pages, I discovered responses which formed patterns or themes, commonalities, and uniqueness. This method allowed me to see words I had not heard either in the original conversations or in listening to the recordings.

The next step in this research process was to give the participants opportunity to identify themes. By employing active sensitivity, I asked questions which did not control, manipulate, or obscure the women's perspectives. The women were asked for three adjectives to describe the meaning of needlework to them. I gave them words that I selected to represent my interpretation of the themes. We compared our choices and looked for consensus between researcher and participant. I selected passages from their texts which I believed supported the meaning of needlework to each woman. I also shared selected passages from recorded oral histories as well as from recent quantitative research and asked for confirmation or refutation of their intertextuality and slippage. Facial expressions and inflections in the women's responses spoke louder than their words that my work as translator was on course. The objectivity of my training as interviewer combined with my subjectivity as needleworker and woman to accurately present the facts and meanings of needlework in these women's lives.

The organization and analysis of data began when I placed transcribed interviews before me and studied the material through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. The strategy includes "horizonalizing" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118) the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. From horizonalized statements, the meaning or meaning units were listed. These were clustered into common categories or themes. The clustered themes and meanings were used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience. From the textural descriptions and integrations of textures and structures into meanings, an essence of the phenomenon was constructed.

Role of the Researcher

The task for the researcher is "to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into...her world" (Patton, 1990, p. 279). The interviewer presupposes that the participant has something to say and, thereby, increases the likelihood that the person being interviewed will have something to say. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to ask questions that are understandable. Asking clear questions was an important part of establishing rapport. Heuristic research involves "self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11). As a researcher I was challenged to comprehend the meaning of things and to give these meanings on-going life. The heuristic research process demands the total presence, honesty, maturity and integrity of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990).

It was no simple task to search for themes. The difficult part of interpretation was overcoming the routine ways of thinking which locked me into predetermined decisions. In attempting to understand a phenomenon, I had to assume that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. It was necessary to look at each woman's social environment to assist in understanding what I had observed, heard and read. As I began the examination of the data, I was open to whatever emerged from the data. As investigation progressed, the transcripts revealed patterns. I began to focus on verifying and clarifying what appeared to be emerging.

After identifying the initial findings, I asked for feedback from the participants. With collaborative efforts, we studied the categories to assure that they were readily available to the data being studied. In addition, both the participants and I examined the categories for relevance to the phenomenon we were considering.

Criteria for Validity

Although interpretative phenomenology is not comprised of a set of procedures and techniques, it follows scholarly tradition associated with giving the "best possible account of the text presented" (Benner, 1994, p. xvii). The text must be "auditable and plausible" (Benner, 1994, p. xvii), must increase understanding, and must articulate the practices, meanings, concerns, and practical knowledge of the world it interprets. Good interpretation is guided by an ethic of understanding and responsiveness. One must not read into the text what is not there. "Phenomenology...questions the positivist notion that we can anticipate social structures and set out to measure them with standard survey techniques, ignoring the individual's perspective in the process" (Statham, Miller, Mauksch, 1988, p. 5). Self-knowledge is required to limit the interpreter's projection of his or her own world onto the text (Benner, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

Every category, every theme, every finding arises from the fact that it exists in the data and can be counted even though the researcher may choose not to do so. A theme may be established because it appeared many times and/or for the majority of people who were studied; or it appeared once or a few times but carried important analytical impact. In both cases, themes arise because the support for them is evident to the analyzer (Ely, 1994). As we study lived-experience descriptions and ascertain the themes that emerge, we take note as certain themes recur. The task is to "hold on to these themes by lifting appropriate phrases or by capturing in singular statements the main thrust of the meaning of the themes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). Expressing the overall meaning of a text is a judgement call. Different readers might construe different fundamental meanings. That does not make one interpretation more true than another. It does allow much possibility for error. Active sensitivity must be employed to the process of reflection.

As in any research, validity, reliability, and ethics are major concerns in a qualitative study. Internal validity is addressed by using triangulation, checking interpretations with individuals

interviewed, involving participants in all phases of the research, and clarifying researcher biases and assumptions (Lather, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). Reliability is enhanced by the investigator explaining the assumptions and theory underlying the study, by triangulating data, and by leaving an audit trail--describing in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data. External validity is the object of debate (Lather, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 1990). "Working hypotheses, concrete universals, naturalistic generalization, and user or reader generalizability are suggested as alternatives to the statistical notion of external validity" (Merriam, 1988, p. 184).

The development of the researcher's interpretation of a text does not signal the end of the reflection, comparison, or commentary. Participants, colleagues, scholars, and other readers extend the researcher's perception. The reader plays an active role in critically reading the interpretive work, judging the textual evidence presented by the author, and judging the interpretation against the reader's own knowledge of the subject and text. Each interpreter must acknowledge his or her "silence, similarities, and commonalities" (Benner, 1994, p. xviii). Although the similarities between researcher and participants generate questions, the intent of interpretative study is to avoid projecting one's world onto the world of another. The interpretive researcher listens carefully to hear the voices and concerns expressed in the text and to give them the fullest account. The interpretive account should shed light on the world of the participants, articulating taken-for-granted meanings, practices, habits, skills, and concerns. The soundness of an interpretation is demonstrated when participants agree with the researcher's rendition of the text (Benner, 1994). The other's world is encountered through shared dialogue that allows both similarities and differences (Kesselring, 1990). Methodological rigor is based on reasonable articulation and a strong perspective of what it is to be a human being (Benner, 1994; Dreyfus, 1994; Heidegger, 1962; Lather, 1986; Taylor, 1991). "Interpretive phenomenology offers an alternative to quantitative...studies...because it is

concerned with life-world, human concerns, habits, skills, practices [and] experiential learning" (Benner, 1994, p. xx). Phenomenology as developed by Husserl (1964) offered a view of the life world. Heidegger offered a critique of the understanding of the subjective and objective, the explanation and understanding that separated the sciences (Benner, 1994).

The purpose of basic research is knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Researchers engaged in basic research want to understand how the world operates. They are interested in investigating a phenomenon in order to get at the nature of reality with regard to that phenomenon. The basic researcher's purpose is to understand and explain (Patton, 1990).

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTING THE OUTCOMES

The purpose of this phenomenological cogitation is to attempt to grasp the essential meaning of needlework to women. This chapter explores the stories of the six women interviewed to report on collaboratively identified unique themes and common threads in their experiences as needleworkers. The goal is to use language which correctly identifies their intended truths. The first section of this chapter will distinguish the uniqueness and commonalities found among the six women in this study. In the second section, analogous selections from recorded oral histories and empirical research are presented to emphasize their connections to the common threads which run through these women's lived experiences.

Profiles of the Women

The six women who participated in this study were needleworkers. They willingly shared the meaning of needlework to them. In an effort to protect the women and their words, each woman is identified by an innominate word and presented alphabetically.

Alno: A Curious Person

Alno described herself as a curious person,

> A seventy-five year old maid or maybe spinster, to be politically correct, who is a curious person who is curious to know what I can accomplish. As far as needlework is concerned, that is the best way I can do it.

Alno spent several years as an adult caregiver and community volunteer. She was an occasional shopper in my needlework shop. When she came into the store, she usually had a specific request. Frequently the request was for a hard-to-find item for a project she had discovered. Once she wanted the braid necessary for creating Battenburg lace. After much searching I was able to locate a kit, but the directions were in a foreign language. Rather than

dismiss the idea, she purchased the kit and set out to find a way to decipher it.

Alno learned to crochet in her early teens when her mother showed her basic stitches. She began by making doilies, table runners, and "little things to go in chairs." She continued to prefer crocheting more than any of the other types of needlework she has attempted. She said,

> I've never been as successful with knitting as I have with crochet. I never made it with tatting. I just could not make it with that. I find myself ever once in a while wishing I was able to do counted cross-stitch, but I have learned that it is not a viable procedure for me because it is much too close for the condition my eyes are in.

Alno did not consider herself very different from other needleworkers, but declared that she did needlework for the same reasons as most other women who do needlework. She acknowledged,

> They do it partly to fill their time up and partly to have the ability to say, "This I made with my own hands. This I did." That's what makes it valuable to me.

When I asked Alno how she chose the projects she worked on, she replied,

> Basically, I just look at something and it looks interesting. Case in fact, I got a catalogue for needlecraft, yarn and stuff. They had a wedding collar which was a detachable collar thing that you crochet, but it also had a lining. I've got about as much use for one of those things as a cow does for a tiara, but I made one. It turned out very nice. I don't know what I'll do with the collar, but I've got it, and it was fun doing it.
>
> Of course, you know what happened with the Battenburg. When I got the magazine and saw it and thought it would be fun to try. When the instructions came, they were in Danish. Fortunately the magazine was in English and had some sort of pattern and instruction. There was enough in the magazine article as to how to handle the braid and so forth to do it by looking at the pictures in the Danish, you could work it out. This is another example of how you can do even if it looks impossible.
>
> There was a lady, an older woman who lived next door to us when I was in high school who had crocheted all her life, but she never read an instruction book. She could look at anything that was made and copy it. She never read instructions. She used to buy an instruction book at the dime store and bring it to me and say, "Will you make this and this and this?", and I'd make them for her, and then she would copy them.

These stories supported Alno's earlier claims about the criteria for project selection. She

said, "I like experimenting with different kinds of things. I enjoy a new idea, picking up a new idea and adapting it and doing it."

Alno also preferred to engage in some kind of activity, and despised being idle. She contended,

> The woman who sits on the front porch and rocks back and forth and watches the traffic is *not* my idea of the way to live. I could never join the Bingo girls. I'm not fond of shopping. I can't just sit and twiddle my thumbs. I usually do it at night when I'm sitting around after supper, and of course, on a rainy day when I can't be outside, or waiting in the doctor's office and places like that. Perhaps one of the reasons that I do as much as I do is the simple reason that I have time that I have to find something to do with.

Alno valued her independence and enjoyed needlework "for my own entertainment, my own satisfaction." She spoke of her concern about how her ability to do needlework would be affected if a threatening eye condition took her sight,

> I'd climb the walls. It would be difficult. Believe me, that's something I've given some thought to. All I need is for that left eye to go out because the right one is already gone. I've spent several months wondering what would happen to me. I won't say that I worried about it a great deal, but I found myself at times sitting with my eyes closed trying to crochet seeing what it would be like, to see if I could handle that sort of thing without my eyesight. I can learn to feel my way around, but what do I do with all those hours when there's nothing to do but stare into open space and not see anything!

She described the meaning of needlework to her as pleasure. She declared,

> I do get a lot of pleasure out of it. It is fulfilling. It gives you something to do and shows results in the process. It's enriching. It gives you a chance to learn. You learn a lot about a lot of things. You pick up a lot of information--some of it useful and some you may never use again, but you have it. I do it more for the pleasure than anything else. Of course, the satisfaction of knowing that I have accomplished something.

Alno did not give a great deal of consideration to the monetary value of needlework. She said,

> I never claimed to do anything to a craft sale quality. I don't do it for that reason, but I enjoy what I do and I do it more for my own pleasure than for anything I could get out of it.

> If I had to produce one thing after another, and you have to to make a profit, it would take the pleasure out of it. I wouldn't do it. I would never do it to make a living. So as a result I don't often make it for sale.

Alno's narratives were tied together by her value of learning, her distaste for idleness, and her pride in accomplishment. Her ability to do needlework satisfied her expressed needs in these areas. She said that needlework was important to her because it kept her hands busy when she was sitting, it was fascinating, and it was interesting. She said, "I enjoy what I do, and I do it more for my own pleasure than for anything else."

Although she named pleasure as the primary meaning of needlework to her, I inferred that for Alno pleasure meant pride in accomplishment and the opportunity to occupy her mind and her time with a pursuit that she valued.

Cabe: An Enthusiastic Person

I have used bold-face type in some places when recording Cabe's words because that is the way she spoke. Her enthusiasm for her needlework was indicated as much by the inflection as by her choice of words.

Cabe was a middle-aged woman with adult children and grandchildren. She was a secretary and recent widow at the time of our first interview. Cabe was a frequent visitor to my needlework shop. She often stopped by on her way home from work to pick up one or two small items that she needed for a work-in-progress. Occasionally she asked for help in understanding a difficult pattern or selecting a specific fabric. She appreciated being directed to designs that were new and appealing. I usually assisted her in determining how her needlework projects would be finished. Cabe participated in an annual needlework show sponsored by my store. On more than one occasion, her entries captured top awards.

Cabe first learned to crochet as a young woman and continued with that skill for several years until she discovered counted cross-stitch. Both Cabe and her husband had experienced serious health problems, and needlework was woven throughout those experiences. When

Cabe was a patient in the hospital, her daughter brought her a small cross-stitch kit which she completed while recuperating. Cabe said,

> I was in the hospital with a back problem and at the same time my middle son's first child was born. While I was in the hospital, my daughter brought me the whole kit and caboodle, and so I started on just a little round thing that you put in a gold frame that says something about the precious baby. And then she brought me the sampler for the birth certificate with the birth and the flowers and all that. That's when I started, September, 1980, and I have not stopped since. Thirteen years. My house is full of it. I've **never** gotten tired of it. I love it, and I'll always love it. I see things that I get so excited about. I cannot wait to get started.

Cabe valued the ability and work of other crafters; however, she believed that her counted cross-stitch made her work as worthy as theirs. She recounted,

> I see a lot of these craft shows and I see the things that people do with stuffed dolls and Raggedy Ann dolls and I think, "Wouldn't that be neat?" I just love to go and see all this **beautiful** stuff that people do. I think to have all the beauty and all the things, the different things, that they bring, it's a big treat to get to see all the different things that people have been doing. But do they do cross-stitch? That's their bag and this is my bag.

When I asked Cabe why she did needlework, her enthusiasm continued in her answer. She declared,

> I've had people to say, "How do you sit and do that stuff constantly? Don't you just get so nervous, frustrated, or tired of it?" In fact, I could do it all day long. And I have done it all day long recuperating from surgery, or you just don't feel good and don't do anything else, and you're alone. I've cross-stitched. A lot of people would read. I cross-stitch.
>
> I don't really, really enjoy it unless I'm really excited about it. I'll still do it, still enjoy it to a degree, but I won't be as anxious about getting to it at the end of the day. You know, I can't **wait** to get it done. It's so different. It's just gonna be so beautiful, gorgeous. Ah, I like to do things.
>
> I used to give everything away. I guess that's when I first started. I was doing it to give away. And I did that for a long, long time. And then I decided, I'm going to do a few things for me. Then I quit giving them away. I do 'em for me. Just for me.
>
> All the thirty-some people that I work with every day get so excited about my cross-stitch. Every time I had one framed, I have to take it down there and set it up somewhere for them so they could all see it. They'd say, "I don't **know** how you do it. I just don't know how you do it."

> I've been doing some things that you use like two completely different types of thread together to make it look what its supposed to look like. It's very difficult to work with. It knots very easily. It tangles real easily. You have to take patience to use it. It was a challenge. I guess I like a challenge to see how it's gonna come out.

At one point in our conversation, I asked Cabe to describe how she valued her needlework. She took a deep breath and then said,

> Well, a lot of people have asked me from time to time if I would sell 'em, and I said, "Well, I don't know." I don't think anybody could afford 'em. There's a lot of love in it whether anybody appreciates that or not, a lot of time, really very little expense. I guess you could put a monetary value on it. Like I say, I don't think anybody could afford it. When you look at it, you see love, a lot of work, a lot of interest. If I every give them away, I gotta love that person an awful lot to give it up 'cause I want to keep 'em all.

Cabe's enthusiasm became subdued when I asked her what she would do it she couldn't continue to do cross-stitch. Heretofore, her answers had been full of exuberance and embellished with several examples. This time her reply was succinct, "I've often thought about that, and I **really, really** don't know." She quickly changed the subject to a more upbeat topic.

I reasoned that her answer was linked to her impending hospitalization for investigation of a recurring illness that had eluded diagnosis. Her silence was deafening. It added intensity to the next question.

I asked Cabe to characterize the meaning of needlework to her, and she said,

> Ah, it's therapy. It is **really** therapy for me. I can be so uptight or so nervous, and I can sit down and cross-stitch, and it's like I've had a tranquilizer. And it's been that way from day one.

Cabe's primary descriptor for the meaning of needlework was therapy. While she appreciated the calming effect of doing counted cross-stitch, she also valued it as a challenging way to learn new things, a creative means of expression, a tangible reinforcement of her need to feel pride and a sense of accomplishment. In my evaluation of Cabe's words, I heard her describe her needlework as a source of comfort and reassurance in her world filled with

uncertainty caused by serious illness and death.

Gagi: A Reflective Person

Gagi was a mid-fifties single parent. She had one married daughter and at the time of the initial interview, one grandson. Gagi lived alone and worked in a manufacturing plant. She visited my needlework shop almost every week. Frequently her daughter and grandson accompanied her. Occasionally we talked about crafts and her current project. Sometimes she asked my advice on a procedure. She brought finished items for me to see. In a couple of cases she attended workshops I taught.

Gagi related that she had been interested in needlework about sixteen years since taking a lap quilting class. Prior to that she had pieced a quilt which was quilted and finished by a relative. She was interested in a variety of crafts. Sewing projects were her greatest interest, but not all sewing projects had equal value to her.

> Now I might make a dress now and then or a jumper or something for my daughter because she wants one and I know I can do it, but it's not something that I really like to do. I mean I'd rather use my time to do something else than that. I mean I will make the practical things, but I still have it in my mind to make a quilt, a complete quilt from start to finish.

Gagi spoke at length about her need to create various needlework projects as a way to be remembered by future generations of her family. She said that she did not chose projects just for herself; instead she selected items to make with a particular person in mind. Her satisfaction came from the process of deciding how to assemble the project and then finishing it. Her greatest reward came from the pleasure that her work gave to someone else. Gagi told the story of making a stuffed bunny for a relative's Christmas present. Gagi had used an old dress that had belonged to her relative's grandmother to obtain fabric for the bunny's costume. She explained,

> She was thrilled to death with it because it was something that I had made but yet her mother had made part of it, too because when I cut this dress, I pieced a panel onto it. I

> cut pantaloons from the sleeve and I left the cuff on it with the buttons and everything because her mother had made this dress, and then when I did the bottom of the dress, I used the bottom part of Grandma's dress and left the hem in it. I put it together, but most of the fingerwork was already done. So that really made her appreciate it more, too because of the fact that her mother had worked on it and it was her grandmother's dress. I like to do stuff that carries on a little bit of the heritage.

In addition to its link with the past and the future, needlework gave Gagi an opportunity to be creative. She told me of some of the ways that she was inspired to begin a project. She said,

> I might be sitting at work or I might pick up a magazine or something and see something in it that I really liked. When I went to work, I was thinking about it continuously while I was at work, and I just couldn't wait to get home and to get back to my sewing room to see if I've got some cloth or something I can put together and do this. Sometimes I might stay up until three o'clock in the morning. I get busy with it and I don't want to do anything else. I just wanna piddle back there in that junky room and do my thing. I hate it when I have to lay it down and stop and get ready to go to work.

When I asked Gagi about the value of needlework to her, she replied,

> It relaxes me! It's a relaxing thing once people get into it. I can sit and work on something and it gives me a sense of satisfaction thinking that years from now my great grandchildren might get hold of one of the bunnies or Humpty Dumpties that I've made and say, "Gosh, look what my great grandmother did" The frivolous things are a lot more valuable to me as far as making them than the practical things. It's just like they are a part of me. When I give one away, it's just a little part of me that's gone. To me it's valuable. I guess it all goes back to roots.
>
> I don't think you could ever get into it for money. I don't think with your time and everything, you could ever make money with it, but as a legacy to somebody that would be valuable. A friend gave me a piece of embroidery that she had done years ago. I wouldn't take anything for it. I mean to me stuff like that is to some people it might be a piece of junk or just a rag, but to me it's valuable.
>
> Some people might have things they think are valuable. They might think their TV is valuable. But you could buy them anywhere. To me crafts are things that you can't just buy anywhere. They might say I have a lot of junk in my house, but it's my junk and I like it.

When I asked Gagi to tell me how her life would be affected if she were unable to work on any of her needlework projects, she declared emphatically,

> I wouldn't be a happy person! I would be very unhappy! That's my enjoyment. That's my outlet; something I really like to do. I'm sure I would be looking around trying to find something else I could do. I don't think I could ever totally get out of crafts. I'd really hate to have to give up my crafts. I really would.

The primary meaning that Gagi gave to needlework was the linkage it provided with the past, present, and future. Family was an important consideration for Gagi. All the projects that she discussed in our conversation were things she had done for members of her family. She valued the potential of needlework to tie families together over time. A secondary reward to her was an outlet for creativity and an opportunity to practice learning and discovery.

Haei: A Meticulous Person

Haei was a very active woman in her eighties. She had four adult children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She was a homemaker who had lived in the same home for more than fifty years. She visited my needlework shop on an irregular basis often just to look and visit. She usually was involved in a needlework project. She described herself as a loving, caring, very energetic person who wanted to be doing something all the time. She said,

> I'm not content to sit and hold my hands. I just like to be active. I don't like to sit and not do anything. I don't watch television unless I am using my fingers, making something, doing something, repairing or making something new. I enjoy it. That's what I would rather be doing, something with my hands or using my mind.

Haei recalled learning to sew and doing embroidery when she was a high school home economics student.

> We did underwear. I remember it was blue material. It was cotton, and I embroidered little pink and blue flowers on the little half slip, the best I remember, and a bra. That was the first because I don't think I did much needlework on anything at home.

Haei thought a few minutes before answering my question about the uniqueness of her needlework when compared to that of other needleworkers. Finally, she said,

> I don't think there would be any difference. If it's the same kind of work, if it's the same

> embroidery or cross-stitch, it's supposed to be the same, and I don't think there would be any difference. If it's supposed to be perfect, it would be the same then. If the work is finished perfectly, it should come out the same. I can't see that it would be any different from anyone else's work.

On the other hand, it was not so hard for Haei to come up with an answer when I asked how she thought her needlework was like other stitcher's work. She said,

> Everyone else's needlework looks better than mine does. I think so. If it had been years ago, perhaps it would not have been that much different. I see some now that is so pretty, so perfect that mine isn't. I don't do it as often.

I found it interesting that Haei had answered these two questions in reverse order from what I expected. I knew from the projects that she brought into the shop for me to see her work was meticulously executed. She gave attention to details. Perhaps her first answer implied that she believed the potential for perfection existed, and the second answer indicated that she thought she did not measure up to the mark she set for herself.

Haei indicated that she preferred to do needlework at night when she was sitting down and relaxing. She selected projects according to what she was interested in at the time. She said,

> I think your interests change with age. I used to do a lot of sewing for my daughters. I did lots of smocking. I made a lot of baby clothes. I did the hemstitching by hand. I enjoyed that. I didn't make any baby clothes until I had my girls, but I didn't do much sewing for the boys. I made my daughters' evening dresses and I enjoyed that. I enjoyed making clothes. I'd embroider occasionally. I've never crocheted. Tatting. I didn't do that. Then I did Swedish embroidery. I made Holly Hobbie dolls. That's my limit...clothes and a little extra.

As Haei and I talked, it became clear that for her, the value of needlework included more than a way to stay busy, or to experience accomplishment. She revealed that needlework is meaningful because it helped her to relax from the exertion of physical labor and mental or emotional stress. She explained,

> Oh, you feel so relaxed with it. You want to forget other things. If you worked all day and you need to rest, it's a relaxing thing for me. Just to sit down and try to forget everything

> else and just sit with your fingerwork and whatever it is that you are doing. I say it could be a life saver. Perhaps in your day if you feel troubled or tired and it's just a time when you can relax. It perhaps would save your day.

Haei's persona radiated dignity, competence, and self-control. When she said these words, she spoke with deliberation and intensity not found in the words alone. Her whole body focused on what she was saying. These were important words for her.

Another value of needlework for Haei was as a means of creative expression. She said,

> I enjoy the embroidery or cross-stitch that I can do better, and so I'll stick to that. I can't draw. I can't paint. I never did learn any of that in school, but I think my sewing is my outlet. A lot of people have other outlets, but I just never have because I love sewing. I love to sew.

Haei also recognized the capacity of needlework to join the past, present, and future. She said,

> It's valuable because in years to come it can be an antique for some person that's interested in this same project whatever it is. I have some pieces that is embroidered that I love. I've stored them now, and I think they are very valuable to hand down for generations. Certain people would think there's value there.

When I asked Haei why she chose needlework as a means of expression, she replied,

> What else would it have been? People stayed at home and they needed something. Baking or cooking or sewing was the only thing. Back when I had my children, there was some few women that did not have children who worked. There were a few women who had children and worked. Unless it was a necessity, they stayed at home. If you went on to college and had an education, you could do other things. Take [her friend], she went to school and majored in music and that's her therapy, but still she does needlework. Beautiful needlework. She doesn't have to limit hers to just sewing.

Haei summarized her thoughts by saying that needlework meant relaxation, creativity, and a sense of accomplishment. As I read and re-read her words in the transcripts, and listened to her words on the tapes, I came to believe that all three of these words were parts of what Haei meant when she called needlework therapy.

Kigo: A Competent Person

The fifth participant in this study was Kigo. She was a middle-aged married woman with three children, two of whom were adolescents. She was a well-educated full-time homemaker who was married to a busy professional man. She had done needlework since she was a young child and had a high level of proficiency. Her preferred type of needlework was counted cross-stitch. She presented an image of dignity, self-reliance, competence, and adaptability. She described herself as a wife and mother in a very busy household.

Kigo told me that she first started to do needlework when she was about seven or eight years old. She first learned how to stitch from an elderly great aunt. Kigo recounted,

> I got a little embroidery kit for Christmas. I played around with it for a while and then a great aunt sat down beside me and showed me what I was supposed to do with it. We never really talked very much or had much interaction, but over the stitchery, we did. We talked about when she was a little girl and did needlework, and we didn't branch out into other topics. She would sit beside me, and we would just quietly work on our projects together and it was a lot of fun. I felt like a big girl when I was doing it. Then I made doll clothes after that. I would embroider the edges of those, sew lace on them. I didn't start to cross-stitch and regularly doing needlework until I finished college. It was an activity to do after that.

Kigo had experimented with other crafts and had determined that cross-stitch was the one that gave her the most pleasure and satisfaction. I asked her to tell me when she preferred to work on cross-stitch. She said,

> At night after I've finished fixing supper and gotten everybody started on their homework, and it's starting to be quiet, time to wind down, have a few minutes peacefully to sit and work on something.
>
> I just go back over what's happened during the day and I can think about other things rather than just concentrating on the needlework.
>
> I do it almost every night. It's sort of therapy for me to have this quiet time to work on the different projects I work on.

Kigo told me that doing needlework made her feel "calm and collected and more serene than the rest of the day." She also reported that there were specific ways that she valued

needlework. She said,

> It's something that's regular and predictable and soothing. It's something that if you follow the rules, follow all the directions, it will come out exactly right. There no question about it. It will always work, and I like the predictability of it. It's the repetitiveness and the control that I have over needlework that appeals to me.

Kigo also saw needlework as a way to be creative. She illustrated,

> It's sort of a way to be creative even though I'm not creative myself. I end up making something that's pretty and new to me. I know I'm not an overly creative person, and this is the closest I can get, painlessly.

Kigo recognized doing needleworking as an opportunity to accept the challenge of learning. She said, "I like to do new stitches and threads and new fabrics and new designs."

I recalled that Kigo was a participant in almost every needleworking class that I had held during the ten years that I operated the needlework shop. She mastered complicated stitches, conquered difficult pattern designs, and chose fabrics for their appropriateness for the design rather than ease of use.

Kigo realized a value of needlework as a thread from the past to the future on both a personal and generalized basis. She recalled her experience in learning needlework from her aunt and said, "That's the only time she and I ever did anything much together. This is my only real memory of her." Kigo also said,

> It's fascinating to think of a child sitting down quietly and working on something as involved as samplers. When I've tried to help my daughter with cross-stitch, she'll only sit for a few stitches and then she's up and running around doing something else. She knows how to do it. She's just not dedicated enough to put in the time that's involved for an extensive project.

Kigo was concerned for the future of needlework and wondered if I was aware of anything being done to assure young people an opportunity to learn to do needlework. She was hopeful that such a trend existed.

Kigo told me that she selected her projects "just by whether they look pretty to me or not," She explained,

> I just work on whatever is interesting. I may work on Christmas things in January, or I may work on spring things in December. That doesn't matter to me what sort of project it is. It just matters to me that I have this time to work on it myself. I've noticed that at more stressful times, I will work more on the cross-stitch, I will take the extra time to go ahead and do it. I'll get involved in a more complicated pattern at stressful times whereas I'm more satisfied with something easy at the easier times.

Kigo was clearly disturbed when I asked how her life would change if she couldn't do cross-stitch. Although her words were emphatic, "I would lose my mind", they did not convey the anguish that appeared on her face. She realized, as did the other participants in this study, that she would need a substitute activity. She was an avid reader but rejected reading as a substitute because "it fills a little bit different niche than the needlework does." At a subsequent interview, Kigo said,

> I would have to find something else that I could do because it really is a haven for me, and I've thought several times since you brought that up, "Really, what would I do?" and I have no idea what it could be.

Kigo's words revealed that for her the greatest meaning of needlework was what she labeled predictability. Although creativity and a sense of accomplishment were important to her, predictability appeared to be a requirement. For Kigo these three terms, in this priority order, defined therapy.

Mawi: An Intense Person

Mawi was an intense, personable woman in her forties. She was recently divorced at the time of our first interview. She had one son in college. Mawi was a well-educated woman who was achieving success in her profession. She exuded determination and confidence and had well defined interests and goals. She was skillful in different types of crafts but preferred to do counted cross-stitch.

Mawi described herself as very energetic and very demanding. She continued,

> I don't want to say cocky because that's not the right word, but very self-assured. I know that there's some things I could do that I do well and I know that there's some things that I can't do, and I don't do them at all. But I feel like I had a very, very strict upbringing and was told early on that you can do what you want to do and was expected to be somebody; not the best at anything and not the worst at anything; not something like president of the United States or something. Just an honest work. I was expected to do that. I'm very self-reliant which has come in handy and be able to take care of yourself. With my divorce, it's really come in handy. So I feel like I am very demanding, very strict.
>
> On the other hand, there's a very soft side of me that will cry at the drop of a hat over a TV commercial that touches you. I feel like I am a very compassionate person. I feel like I am a very friendly person. I love being around people.

Mawi told me that she had sewed her clothes as a young girl and had continued until after she married and had her son. She explained,

> I used to make my own clothes, but I hadn't done any creative things like cross-stitch. I quit sewing my clothes right after [her son] was born because I didn't have the time. The church I was in, there were several girls in there who did cross-stitch, and we started meeting together once a month for what we called a craft group, but really we did cross-stitch. All of us were young. All of us had small children. Most of us worked and it was just time to get together and have some fellowship and not necessarily do church work. Everyone would just bring what they were working on at that time and that's how I learned cross-stitch. We just all brought our cross-stitch and sat there and talked and cross-stitched and had coffee and cookies. Really nice times.

I asked Mawi to tell me how she felt when she was working on her counted cross-stitch. She replied enthusiastically,

> I enjoy it! It's therapy! It's like being outside. I like to do it outside where it is nice and sunny and warm. And cross-stitch is that same thing.
>
> It's a sense of accomplishment. When you start a piece and then when you finish a piece and have it framed, you can look at it and say "I did that" and it looks pretty and people admire it. So it gives you a sense of accomplishment and pride that you've done it and you can get it accomplished. Some things you don't ever seem to get to the end of, but you can do [needlework] when you have time, and you can lay it down for two months and pick it up and work on it again. You can work on it for a week and lay it down. That is what I like about cross-stitch, too. It's not something that you have to work a certain amount of time on to see your results. You could sit down and work a half hour and see a lot of results on a piece.

> Ah, it's relaxation. It's therapy. When you work on it, you can forget about other things. Ah, and there again, that sense of accomplishment. It looks hard to someone that is looking at it, but it is so easy to do. You don't have to take nine courses in how to cross-stitch. If you can make an x and look at a chart and count, then you can do cross-stitch. Anyone who is willing to and wants to can pick it up in ten minutes. It's just good therapy.

Mawi added further clarification to her definition of therapy when she explained,

> I have a never-ending battle with weight. A lot of times I'll just make myself sit down and cross-stitch instead of getting a cookie to eat. It's just good therapy.

When I asked Mawi to tell me how she thought she would feel if she were unable to do cross-stitch, she responded,

> It would be a big part of my life gone. I remember one Christmas I had to lay flat on my back for six weeks, and I had started several cross-stitch pieces. I just didn't feel like there was any way I could get them done for Christmas, and I was so disappointed. Finally, I got some colored pens and marked the graph with colored pens and taped the graph to my knees and cross-stitched with my hands up in the air laying flat on my back. I was determined that I was going to get those pieces done for Christmas. So I would miss it a whole lot.
>
> You know, if I got arthritis in my hands and couldn't do it, or if, God forbid. anything happened to my eyes that I couldn't do it, I would definitely miss it.

Since needlework appeared to be such an important activity for Mawi, I asked her what she would do if she couldn't do cross-stitch. She laughingly said, "Probably eat and weigh 400 pounds." Then she clarified,

> I've gotta have my hands busy doing something. Growing up on a farm you didn't have idle time. We were always doing something and that is, when you grow up like that, then it's not that I feel guilty when I do sit down and relax because I do more than I ever thought I would, but you are just trained to do things all the time. There's always something that needs to be done. Always.

Mawi explained that needlework had other value to her. She, like other participants, saw needlework as a way to link generations of people. She said,

> I love antiques and I love old things, and I love going to the flea market and seeing cross-stitch that has someone's initials and the year on it. And you know, you think about those people. I would love to pass some things down and have my grandchildren or great grandchildren or great nieces or whatever look at them and say, "That was my mama's sister, and she did this back in 1979" which to them would sound like 200 million years ago. Ah, but there again, it's that feeling of accomplishment, of doing something. Monetarily it doesn't have a whole lot of value, but the value is the sentimental value that it has.

Clearly feeling a sense of accomplishment was Mawi's primary reason for doing needlework. Relaxation, predictability, and creativity played less important roles in her choice of needlework as an activity. As I read Mawi's words, it occurred to me that each of these four terms formed the definition of therapy for her. It was interesting that as the most highly educated participant in the study, she hardly mentioned the quality of learning as a consideration when choosing to do needlework.

Commonality and Uniqueness

A look across the stories of all the women who were collaborating with me on this project revealed both common and unique aspects. Although the women selected for this study were different in terms of age, education level, lifestyle, needlework skill level and needlework supplies purchasing habits, as I listened to their voices, I heard the same words in individual conversations. Accomplishment, pride, pleasure, soothing, relaxing, and creative were words woven into their stories. A need to feel busy permeated their stories. They spoke of the challenge of creating a project but appreciated the predictability of needlework that allowed them to achieve success.

The women used many of the same words when they spoke of their needleworking, but gave them different priority. For Alno the challenge of learning or satisfying her curiosity about a new idea was a primary value. Cabe appreciated the calming, soothing feelings that needleworking gave her. Gagi chose needlework as the way she could link herself with past and future family members. Haei wanted to feel busy and to occupy herself with a task that she considered worthwhile. Kigo valued the predictability of needlework which gave order to

her busy life. For Mawi a sense of accomplishment held the greatest importance.

The women appeared to share a common understanding of the meaning of needlework. They mentioned a shared desire for having something to do, creativity, needing to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment, patience and persistence to complete a task, and a way to connect themselves with generations of family members. The greatest differences came in the value each woman gave to the qualities she ascribed to needlework. Each woman's individual personality was evident in her evaluation of needlework. All of these combinations of terms, whether alike or different, were grouped by the women to describe what they meant when they used the word therapy. The therapeutic value existed in different forms for different women, but it existed in some form for all of them. Thus, the primary theme resulting from examination of the interviews with these six women regarding the value of needlework was therapy. Secondary themes evident in conversations with the women included predictability, creativity, accomplishment, learning, and family ties. These words were recombined by each of the six women to describe an individual meaning of needlework. As I read the transcripts of the interviews with the women who were participants in this study, I was reminded of the words of women who related their oral histories. The similarities between the two texts gave validation to my interpretation of the meaning of needlework to women.

Therapy: "It's my therapy"

The most common way of describing the meaning of needlework was "It's my therapy." I came to believe that the other terms were secondary themes and the primary theme was therapy. Each woman's social context determined whether therapy meant predictability, creativity, accomplishment, or learning to her. All of the participants identified needlework as filling the need for therapy in a way that nothing else could.

The women had a common response to my query about how their life would be different if they could no longer do needlework. All six said they would have to find something else to do. That response came immediately and strongly. All of the women agreed that the loss of the

ability to do needlework would leave a space in their lives that would be difficult to fill. All agreed that any substitutes such as puzzles or reading would not completely fill the niche occupied by needlework, but a substitute was a requirement. The women could not identify another way to use their time that would dispense the same value that needlework did. I inferred that the women, like their ancestors, depended on needleworking as their way of coping with daily living. Each woman's need was unique.

Although I had been closely involved with needlework as a stitcher, instructor, or business owner for almost twenty years, I was not prepared for the intensity with which they responded to my question. Each time I revisited the women, they recalled that particular part of our conversations and the thoughts that they had provoked. The theme name therapy received the greatest range of responses. The women's definitions of therapy included words which they had used to describe the terms they named when I asked for descriptions of the meaning of needlework. Haei said, "You forget everything else and your mind is centered on that." Kigo said, "It's my haven." When some of the women described the meaning of pleasure and relaxation, they used the same words that others used to describe therapy.

When I inquired about the difference in her life if she were unable to do needlework, Kigo took a deep breath and said, "I would lose my mind!" Alno wrinkled her nose in distaste for my question and said, "I don't even want to think about that!" After a long pause Cabe disclosed,

> Gosh, that's a toughie because I love it. I really love it. It's a big part of my life. I don't belong to clubs, and I don't do a lot of things, but it's because I want to cross-stitch. It means that much in my life.

The women spoke with strong emotion of the reasons needlework was so valuable to them. Cabe said, "Ah, it's therapy, It is really therapy for me. I can be so uptight or so nervous and I can sit down and cross-stitch, and it's like I've had a tranquilizer."

Kigo concurred,

> It's sort of therapy for me to have this quiet time to work on the different projects I work on. I've noticed that at more stressful times, I will work more on the cross-stitch. I'll get involved in a more complicated pattern at stressful times, whereas I'm more satisfied with something easy at the easier times.

Haei responded, "I say it could be a life saver. It would perhaps save your day."

Mawi said, "It's my sanity. It's so peaceful, so soothing."

Gagi succinctly concluded, "It just means a lot to me."

The meaning of needlework to women in this study echoed the feelings of their ancestors. While Mary, Queen of Scots, was held in house arrest from 1559 to 1584 she consoled herself by helping to create a series of bed hangings which came to be one of her best-known embroideries and is housed in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

More recently Ginnie Thompson wrote,

> In the seventies and eighties, I had large boxes of letters from counted cross-stitchers. Most of the correspondents thought of cross-stitch as an enjoyable pastime, but a percentage of the stitchers used cross-stitch to help them survive tragedies and these were heart-rending. One woman used stitching to maintain a serene appearance for her dying child as she sat by his bed. A local customer turned out prodigious amounts of embroidery which she accomplished while she and her son rested each day. She had had infantile paralysis while carrying him and both were affected. (G. Thompson, personal communication, March 31,1994)

Not only have women looked to their needlework for a way to get through difficulties in their lives, they have also depended on it for assistance in coping with day-to-day living. "I know how hard the shut-in days are, all alike and no pleasures unless we make them for ourselves" (Bailey, 1945, p. 158).

The women I interviewed spoke of the times when doing needlework was important to them. Cabe said,

> Usually when I'm working, I cross-stitch at night, after I crawl up in the bad and try to get relaxed and settle down from the duties of the day. It's like taking two aspirins. I have to unwind and that's my unwinding.

Kigo valued the time she spent in needleworking. For her the quiet time to work was more important than the project she chose. She explained,

> I do it almost every night. It's sort of therapy for me to have this quiet time to work on the different projects I work on. I just work on whatever is interesting. I may work on Christmas things in January or I may work on spring things in December. That doesn't matter to me what sort of project it is. It just matters to me that I have this time to work on it myself. I work on it at night after I've finished supper and gotten everybody started on their homework, and it's starting to be quiet, time to wind down, have a few minutes peacefully to sit and work on something.

Mawi acknowledged,

> I enjoy it. It's like being outside where it is nice and sunny and warm. Cross-stitch is the same thing. It's relaxation. It's therapy. When you work on it, you forget about other things.

Haei said, "If you worked all day and you need to rest, it's a relaxing thing for me. Just to sit down and try to forget everything else and just sit with your fingerwork."

Alno declared,

> I use it for relaxing. It eases the tension on my nerves when I'm waiting for anything. It makes time pass easier, and it is a way of passing time as much as anything else. I am more interested in the fun I have doing it than in the results.

Gagi related, "It's just like I'm in another world. I get busy with it and I don't want to do anything else. I hate it when I have to lay it down and get ready to go to work."

Lane (1963) wrote that in the "Age of Anxiety," as all ages are, nothing is more tranquilizing than a quiet hour of needlework,

> especially needlework as precise and monotonous as the little crisscrosses of cross-stitch. It isn't possible to be agitated while doing needlework. You are still; you rest and you are refreshed. The needle runs easily back and forth through soft cloth while nerves relax and useless worries fade away. (p. 57, 79)

If other justification were required for doing needlework, Lane (1963) gave this advice: "If conscience tries to reproach you for idling when there is so much to do, it is silenced when you reply in surprise, 'I am doing something. Look'" (p. 57).

In Daingerfield's (1908) record, Aunt Cynthy offered her version of the meaning of needlework:

> I'd rather piece as eat, and I'd rather patch as piece, but I take natcherally delight in quiltin'. Whenst I war a new-married woman with the children round my feet, hit 'peared like I'd git so wearied I couldn't take delight in nothing; and I'd git ill to my man and the children, and what do you reckon I done them times? I just put down the breeches I was patchin' and tuk out my quilt squar'. Hit wuz better than prayin', child, hit wuz reason. (pp. 526-527)

It appeared that the women in this study as well as the women included in the recorded oral histories felt a calm, soothing feeling associated with their needleworking. It seems to be the same feeling recorded by the participants in the survey research (Clapper, 1993) when they said it made them feel better, or the subjects in the clinical study who registered reduced indicators of stress (Reiner, 1995).

Predictability: "Regular and predictable"

Showalter (1986) argues that women's desire for predictability in their needlework is an example of their adaptation to the demands on their time. The woman to whom predictability was most valuable was the woman whose responsibilities required her time to be fragmented and divided among her obligations. The repetition and monotony of needlework stitches dispensed a soothing, calming effect on the women's disjointed lives. It also gave the women some control over otherwise uncontrollable situations.

As a needlework and craft shop owner, I learned dozens of skills for a variety of activities

in "soft" crafts (needlework) and "hard" crafts (e.g., painting and embossing). The needlework projects were always more inviting to me. I soon discovered that part of their appeal was their predictability. The stitches were usually repetitious. When I began a painting project, there were many unknowns concerning the finished product, but that was not the case with needlework. I could determine the size, shape, and color of the finished product before I started to work and could reproduce the project as many times as I was willing to attempt it. With painting there was never a duplication of design. When I taught a "hard" crafts class, no two products looked the same. When I taught a needlework class, all the students who correctly practiced the techniques I demonstrated, completed projects that were almost identical. Needlework was predictable. One of the characteristics that the women in this study identified as desirable was its predictability. Kigo said,

> It's something that's regular and predictable and soothing. It's something that if you follow all the rules, follow all the directions, it will come out exactly right. There's no question about it. It will always work, and I like the predictability of it.
>
> That would be in the same line as control. If you follow the directions, you will come out with this result. That's something I very much appreciate in needlework.

Gagi reasoned, "It's just one of them [sic] things that you just sit down and try to figure out. The more you make, the more you are confident that this is the way it's done."

Regarding predictability, Alno said, "It would be if you stick to the pattern. It should be."

Haei responded, "If you follow all the rules, it will be perfect. Why would you need the rules if they didn't work?"

Women interviewed twenty years earlier (Cooper & Buferd, 1977) expressed similar sentiments about their needlework, "Piecing is orderly. First you cut out the pieces, then you arrange your pieces just like you want them...finally you bind them and you got the whole thing made up...if you make careful plans, it will come out right" (pp. 20, 90).

The women both in my project and in the recorded oral histories often felt bombarded by

the unrelenting demands of their roles as homemakers and caregivers. Needlework offered some respite from the requirements of their multiple responsibilities (Peto, 1939). Showalter (1986) argued that this is an example of women's adaptation to the structures and demands on their time. In America the method usually employed in teaching sewing and quilting was the "stint"-the assignment of a specific amount of work to be done each day. The procedure of completing a specified amount of work rather than working for an arbitrary length of time seems to have been favored because it allowed some measure of control. The needlework student could, within limits, choose when to do the work (Ferrero, 1987). The grim hours of duty unexpectedly produced the deep joy of work well done, a triumph earned by difficult self-discipline. This analysis seemed to reinforce what the women expressed during our interviews.

In many ways needlework exemplifies an organizing principle of women's life. It is pieced together from scraps of a woman's experience and manifests beauty, utility, and unity. This mode of creation reflects the fragmentation of women's time and is the product of the interrupted life (Hedges, 1991; Lippard, 1983; Showalter, 1986). "I tried to finish the quilt, but was prevented...all my scattering moments are taken up with my needle" (Wheaton in Bank, 1979, p. 92). To some women needlework represents triumph over time and chaos. The products of their needleworking appear to represent to the women an opportunity to display an emblem of their skillful confrontation of disorder. "It is a reassembling process, which in itself may embody a solution to human problems" (Schapiro, 1983, p. 26). This is an idea which the women in this study conveyed in their interviews.

Mainardi (1973) argued that needlework was the only art in which women could experience control. They regulated the education of their daughters and the production of needlework, and were its audience and critics. I assumed that this was a concept that was important to the women in this study since they often referred to needlework's ability to give them a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of completion.

Creativity: "To be creative"

Regardless of whether the women in this study had greatest interest in counted cross-stitching, crocheting, quilting, or decorative sewing, they recognized and valued it as a creative outlet. Women working within the limitations dictated by their social role have explored various media with a vigor and ingenuity that often resulted in strong visual statements (Dewhurst et al., 1979). "It is inspiration...the dogged will to make something extraordinary in the midst of family routine, a sense of wholeness, the wish to please, to succeed, pleasure in the act of working and knowing the power of 'making'" (Schapiro, 1983, p. 26). Lippard (1983) argued, "The only way in which a woman can experience herself as a person is through a creative act of her own" (p. 83). Eberlin and McClure (1927) suggested that the practice of decorative stitchery afforded a legitimate channel for the necessary and natural expression of creative instinct and added an object of interest in otherwise narrow lives.

Needlework provided many opportunities to cultivate creativity for the women in this study. For some just watching the design take shape on an empty piece of fabric was satisfactory. Some enjoyed varying their choice of fabrics or threads. Others could take parts of many different designs to create a new plan to stitch. Still other stitchers selected unique finishing techniques. Each selection represented the individual's interpretation of creativity. One of the attractions of needlework to me was that I could select a level of creativity for the time and current situation. I could simply follow a graph or pattern exactly and have a product very similar to another stitcher's work. Often I would look for ways to vary the same design so I could create new and different designs by selecting a variety in color and texture of background fabric. I knew how to change an entire color scheme on an existing design, or I could draw an original pattern. Creativity means imagination, inventiveness, and originality to me. Creativity had different meanings to the women.

Kigo said,

You can create something from a flat piece of fabric, or you can go further and create something from this pattern by changing this pattern. So there are different ways of being creative.

It's sort of a way to be creative even though I'm not creative myself. I end up making something that's pretty and new to me. I know that I'm not an overly creative person, and this is the closest I can get, painlessly.

Cabe explained,

I guess it's crazy. Most of the time I'm thinking, "I want you to look at this!" You can take nothing, absolutely nothing, but a piece of material and look what you can do with it. With a plain piece of fabric and a few instructions you're making something beautiful. I guess that's maybe how some people feel who paint or draw or whatever. You're taking a little bit of nothing and making a big something out of it.

Alno responded,

It is creative. There's no doubt about that. You can take a piece of twine and a hook and make whatever you make up your mind to make. Or you can take a bundle of scraps and come up with something useful or attractive.

I like experimenting with different kinds of things. I enjoy a new idea, picking up a new idea and adapting it and doing it.

The simple fact that with a piece of thread and a hook you can make a boundless number of things. There is no limit that I can think of to what you can do with a string and a hook.

Mawi explained,

I personally find it hard to understand why people aren't interested because it is one of the...maybe not the simplest...it is one of the most readily available tools whereby you can stretch your imagination, test your ingenuity, and your ability, your creativity. You learn to create something, and I think we all need to develop some form and kind of creativity. To see if we can make something almost from nothing.

Haei said, "I can't draw. I can't paint. I think my sewing is my (creative] outlet."

Gagi explained, "Sometimes I get hold of something, and I just can't wait to try it to see what it's going to look like.

The women reported deep satisfaction that came from stitching their own ideas into tangible reality. Their stories indicated that their needlework provided an opportunity for them to use both hands and minds; to include personality, knowledge, taste, and character. It was a way to make tangible their perception of beauty. Needlework can provide the seeds of genuinely motivated creativity emerging from the grassroots of women's own lives and environments (Lippard, 1983, p. 39). "In taking the monotony out of plain fabrics. Embroidery does the same for the monotony of life" (Christie, 1909, p. 2). Needlework seemed to indicate to the women that they could create out of everyday materials, patterns of "clarity, imagination, and beauty" (Baker & Pierce-Baker, 1985, p. 714). According to Munro (1983), needlework is an amalgam of color and life experience. The women of bygone generations created with brain and fingers, with needle and thread. An early American woman reported, "I embrody [sic] Olivia in the seat of all her daidies. I embrody [sic] lots of little stars and flowers, too." (Wilson, 1992, p. 414). Needlework was virtually the one area in which women could express themselves creatively and find respite from the harshness of their daily lives (Mainardi, 1973).

In 1908 an Appalachian woman spoke of her quilts to a historian, "I reckon you've seen a sight better, but they are always new to me" (Daingerfield, 1908, p. 527). Eaton (1937), in his "account of the handicraft movement in the United States and suggestions for the wider use of handicrafts in adult education and in recreation" (p. x), argues that the opportunity to make a thing of use and beauty is a rare experience...a persistent quest for beauty in the face of discouragement, penury, and hardship. Eaton (1937) wrote of a mountain woman in the 30s:

> Aunt Sal Creech voiced the joy-giving qualities of creative work with the hands when she exclaimed, "Weaving, hit's the purtiest work I ever done. It's setting and trompin' the treadles and watchin' the blossoms come out and smile at ye in the kiverlet.

Eaton (1937) related a report delivered by Mrs. Hatcher who rarely made a duplicate quilt pattern. Although she was an accomplished quilter, Mrs. Hatcher's work was outstanding for its originality. "The roses are not red--that would have been the conventional thing to do and less

interesting; buy blue, pink, yellow, and lavender" (Eaton, 1937, p. 128). "I'm always excited to get at somethin' different. I never like to do two of the same ones. I think this is the prettiest thing I ever did, if I do say so" (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 120).

Needlework has always captivated American women. While often useful, it has also provided an outlet for creativity. Women incorporated needlework into celebrations of births and marriages, expressed opinions, recorded history, and helped causes. Every piece of needlework speaks of the life and times of the creator. In typical Old World needlework, the design was rigid and restricted. American women smashed that rigidity and created their own interpretations of designs. They did in needlework what Americans did in the "human world of living human beings" (Lane, 1963, p. 12). Many surviving pieces of needlework show good taste and creative vitality, in spite of the fact that the early needleworkers' efforts came out of necessity, not as an outlet for creative expression. Peto (1939) explained that to embellish her handiwork was a woman's privilege, provided it did not take up too much time needed for more useful tasks (Peto, 1939).

Accomplishment: "This I did"

Accomplishment was an often-used word in the transcripts. There were differences, however, in the meaning the women attached to the word accomplishment. Some viewed it as control; others saw it as a completed task. Other women equated it with patience and perseverance. For some participants there was a parallel between pride and accomplishment. Part of the women appreciated their needlework as a way to rest from their tasks and stay busy at the same time much as their ancestors had done.

Doing needlework projects provided the women interviewed in this study an opportunity to feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in their abilities. Needlework, because of its usefulness, inspired less fear of being time-wasters, selfish, or self-indulgent (Lippard, 1983). Research reported by Rubin (1985) indicated that it "provided a creative outlet, perhaps a temporary reprieve from the despair of the day, and also produced an object of utility and

beauty" (p. 195). The women I interviewed concurred with Lippard's and Rubin's assessments.

Kigo said,

> It's just satisfying to work with the fabrics, to work with the threads, and to end up with a product when you start with a blank piece of cloth. Yes, ending up with something that is mine and a finished product.

Haei concurred,

> It's sort of a feeling of accomplishment and being able to take pride in what you're doing. I don't like to sit and not do anything. I don't watch television unless I am using my fingers, making something, doing something, making something new. It's valuable because in years to come, it can be an antique for some person that's interested in this same project, whatever it is. It's good to know you can start something and finish it if you want to.

Cabe's response conveyed her enthusiasm,

> You know, you can look at it and say, "I actually did that." I look at that thing, and I don't know how I did it.

Alno agreed,

> I want to be doing something all the time. I'm not content to sit and hold my hands. I just like to be active. It increases; it helps you feel a little better about yourself when you know you can do something and do it reasonably well. You feel like you've done something. When you start a job, and you've stuck to it, and then you've finished it. You feel like you have made some progress.

Mawi related,

> It's a sense of accomplishment. When you start a piece and then when you finish a piece and have it framed, you can look at it and say, "I did that", and it looks pretty and people admire it. It gives you a sense of accomplishment and pride that you've done it and you can get it completed. It's just that sense of accomplishment.

Gagi stated,

> I can sit and work on something and it gives me a sense of satisfaction thinking that years from now my great grandchildren might hold of one of these that I've made and say,

"Gosh, look what my great, great grandmother did."

Many years before Granny Jude made similar comments. She acknowledged that needleworking required work but was balanced by a sense of accomplishment. She said, "I'll not say it's not a worrisome job, but if a body's turned that way, there's a heap of satisfaction in it" (Goodrich, 1931, p. 68).

Peto (1939) reported that needlework had historically filled the need that women felt to keep their hands busy during so-called leisure hours. Cooper and Buferd (1977) recorded contemporary rural women's thoughts:

> I got it all worked out with a little thinking. I had to drive one of them big wheat trucks during harvest. I would just take my piecin' or crochet to the truck with me in the morning. When I had to wait for the men to load or unload the truck, I would just be piecin' on my quilt top. That way I got my quilts done. (p. 78)
>
> I've always belonged to some quiltin' club or church bee. When I was raising my kids the club was always my time to get off and get some relief. I ain't happy doin' nothin'. But if I can take my relaxation with a needle and have some fun talkin', then I think it's all right. (p. 103)

The piece of fabric bought not with money but with the work of the needleworker's waking hours was something to view with special respect. "Each inch was tangible proof of the extent of her efforts" (Fox, 1985, p. 111).

For decades women repeated the sentiment, "If I'm not busy, I'm wanting to be" (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 120). "There was never any time wasted on my quilts. I did my work faithful; and then when I might 'a' set and held my hands, I'd make a block or two of patchwork" (Hall, 1908, p. 58). "It's as near honor to work as anything that ever was done" (Goodrich, 1931, p. 84). I was fascinated with the similarity between the words of the women recorded in oral histories and the participants in this study.

Learning: "To do and find out about"

Doing needlework gave the women included in this research project an opportunity to

continue learning while accomplishing other goals at the same time. Accepting a challenge, satisfying curiosity, and reinforcing self-worth were explanations of the meaning of accomplishment.

All the women in this research were interested in learning for its own sake. Although each woman was quite skillful in some type of needlework, she was always attuned to opportunities to learn more. Kigo reported, "I like to do new stitches and work with new threads, and new fabrics, and new designs." This sentiment was repeated by all the participants. These women knew that finding out more about needlework was different from schooling. Schooling has a beginning and an end with definable milestones along the way. For the needleworkers learning could begin anytime and continue as long as interest was present.

Although I had spent much of my life involved in schooling, I was not finished with learning and neither were the women in the study. All of us were able to use needlework to satisfy one part of our quest. I was interested in learning about new techniques, fabrics, patterns, and upcoming trends in the industry so that I could pass them along to curious customers in my needlework shop. The participants reported other agendas. The common thread of perception allowed us to share a collective philosophy. I understood the women when they told me about how they learned from needlework.

Cabe said, "You know, it's so exciting. I get so excited that I can't wait to get started."

Alno said, "I like challenge. I like different things. The more you learn, the more you can do. You learn alot about yourself if the truth be known."

Gagi said, "Sometimes I get hold of something and I just can't wait to try it to see what it's going to look like."

Historically needlework has provided women with an opportunity to learn. "Quilts kind of filled in for the disappointment of not going to school" (Dewhurst et al., 1979, p. 49).

For women who had attended school as a child, sewing provided a chance to continue to pursue learning.

> A woman did not stop learning when she left her last sewing class as a school girl. She could pick up a new stitch or the technique for a new effect from the women in whose company she sewed. Or, if she lived in one of the bigger cities, she could even attend a class to keep abreast of the latest styles. (Swan, 1977, p. 127)

A January 27, 1774, newspaper advertisement mentioned the subjects offered to young ladies and then added, "Grown ladies may be taught..as a room is set apart for that purpose" (Swan, 1977, p. 127).

The meaning of needlework to the women I interviewed was reflected in an enthusiastic statement of the weaver from the south who said, "I'm a rarin' to draw [the coverlet pattern] in and see how the spots come out. Shucks, ain't it grand, the things they is to do and to find out about" (Goodrich, 1931, p. 83).

Family: "Remember me"

The women, their needlework, and their families were inseparable. Some women valued the opportunity to create for their families. Others appreciated the time they could spend with family as they worked on needlework projects. The women viewed needlework as a means of knitting together the past, present, and future generations.

The concept of family was an important thread throughout all of the women's stories. Some of them, like me, linked their early recollections of needlework to childhood memories and tied them to a particular person or event in their past. Kigo said, "I first started to do needlework when I was about seven or eight...and a great aunt sat down beside me and showed me what I was supposed to do with it."

Other women saw the needlework that they produced as a tangible reminder to present and future generations that they had made a valuable contribution to the family's heritage. Gagi said,

> I want my grandson and his children and their children to look back and say, "Just look at what my great-great grandmother did." It's important to me to be able to do something important to our family heritage for them. I like to do stuff like that, you know, that carries on a little bit of the heritage. I would like to leave something of me after these old bones

are gone. When I give one [stuffed animal] away, it's just a little part of me that's gone.

Haei said,

> I used to do a lot of sewing for my daughters. I did lots of smocking. I did the hemstitching by hand, and I enjoyed that. [The daughters] have some of them and they've got them framed in a glass frame.

Mawi said, "Ah, but, there again, it's that feeling of accomplishment, but the value is the sentimental value."

Alno remembered learning basic stitches from her mother and learning new "diagrams and details for all the various stitches which sort of added a little color to what I had been doing" from information in books her sisters brought home. She enjoyed the teasing by the members of the younger generation of her family when they saw her working with her crochet hook.

Cabe said, "There's a lot of love in it whether anybody appreciates that or not. When you look at the needlework, you see love. If I ever give them away, I gotta love that person an awful lot."

All of the women in this study saw a connection between their families and their needlework. For some of them it involved fond memories of learning to stitch; for others it was the desire to continue family times through their stitching. Other women used their needleworking time as an opportunity to reflect on activities and events with their families each day.

The reflections of the participants in this study were similar to those of the women in recorded oral histories. Hall (1908) wrote of Aunt Jane who said, "One o' the first things I can remember was settin' on the back door-step sewin' my quilt pieces, and mother praisin' my stitches" (p. 58). Another southern woman said, "My mama pieced this one, set it together...and I quilted it. I wouldn't take nothing for it" (Cooper & Buferd, 1977, p. 76).

Women often made quilts and other types of needlework for members of their families,

their legacy to them. Cooper and Buferd (1977) recorded the story of a woman who said, "I reckon everybody wants to leave somethin' behind that'll last after they're dead and gone. It don't look like it's worth while to live unless you can do that" (p. 106). In Hall's (1908) account, Aunt Jane said,

> I've been a hard worker all my life, but 'most all my work has been the kind that perishes with the usin' as the Bible says. That's the discouragin' thing about a woman's work...if a woman was to see all the dishes that she had to wash before she died, piled up before here in one pile, she'd lie down and die right then and there. I've always had the name o' bein' a good housekeeper, but when I'm dead and gone there ain't anybody goin' to think o' the floors I've swept, and the tables I've scrubbed, and the old clothes I've patched, and the stockin's I've darned....But when one of my grandchildren or great-grandchildren sees one o' these quilts, they'll think about Aunt Jane and wherever I am then, I'll know I ain't forgotten. (p. 78)

For many years women created needlework as "albums and di'ries" (Hall, 1908, p. 59). They made quilts from clothing scraps, embroidered diapers, appliqued collars, sewed costumes, and stuffed animals. They used their imaginations and their needles to remember family and friends and to be remembered by them.

As I examined the women's stories and found each one concerned with family, it occurred to me that these women were a kind of family to me. During the ten years that they had been customers, we had shared experiences and interests. They had told me of their joys and sorrows. I had helped them choose projects to fill special needs. They brought me gifts; in return, I encouraged their interest in needlework, applauded their efforts, taught them new skills, helped them out of needle-and-thread predicaments. We had become a family in the terms of family theory which views a family as a structure in itself with boundaries that define and separate it from the outside world (Olson, 1994).

Summary of Themes

Examination of the texts of the women in this study yielded information that was common to all six of them. As a result of the conversations with the women, I determined that the meaning of needlework to the women occurred in levels. The overshadowing level was

therapy. "It's my therapy" was a term I heard again and again from the women. It had been the answer that had aroused my curiosity in the question in the beginning. Underneath the term therapy were five levels all on the same plane which described therapy to the women: predictability, creativity, accomplishment, learning, and family. All five terms were important but were of value to different women in different circumstances.

Often the women in this study spoke of needlework as providing them a creative outlet. They spoke of the ways needlework compensated for characteristics or opportunities they believed to be missing in their lives. They often talked about their inability to draw or paint. They believed that needlework filled the void left by their lack of "artistic" ability.

A Panorama

Reading the women's stories in the recorded oral histories and in the transcripts was like following a panorama of needleworkers. The woman in histories began sentences that could be completed by the women in this study. It was intriguing to hear the same language from women in such diverse times and places. The range of descriptions of the meaning of needlework was not broad, but it was significant by repetition.

Needlework has filled a need for many women. It was a different need for different women. For some, it was a need to create. For others it was the need to make something that they were proud of. For others it was something that gave them pleasure while they were doing it, and a feeling of accomplishment when they completed it. Sometimes it was something for themselves; at other times, it was for someone else. The women acknowledged needlework's unique ability to give each of them an individual experience. At the same time, the women recognized the qualities of needlework which tied them to the larger world experience. This was illustrated clearly when Haei said, "It's common threads. It can mean so many things, but anybody would know what you are talking about when you call it common threads."

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research project was to acknowledge the meaning women gave to their needlework. The individual stories included in this project became sources of information and units of analysis in the search for unifying sets of themes. Qualitative methodology provided abundant views of life and creative sources for synthesis. It permitted insights into what women were thinking and feeling about their needlework and gave greater understanding of an activity of which we were already aware. Qualitative methodologies brought into focus the points of view of those being studied and their active participation in constructing worlds that were sometimes quite different from the worlds in which they were thought to live (Miller et al., 1988). By comparing stories we were able to recognize themes in single settings and across diverse settings. Different sorts of knowledge were produced by this qualitative methodology and by the quantitative ones. Insights that surfaced in quantitative research were expanded in this study.

Conversations with six women and analysis of transcripts of those conversations revealed a primary theme of needlework as therapy. Other themes which were revealed were predictability, accomplishment, creativity, learning, and family. The secondary themes appeared in recombinant forms to define therapy for each of the women. Some themes such as needlework as therapy emerged immediately. Others, such as needlework as an inspiration for learning, emerged subtly after continued analysis.

In their stories the women described ways they used needlework to bring their daily lives under control--"you forget everything else and your mind is centered on that," provide themselves both autonomy--"it's mine, I did that!" and connection--"if it had something to do with part of my family or someone who is real close then I wanted to do it," and transform what

might be degrading work into "good" work--"to some people it might be junk; to others it might be treasures." The women took pride in their achievements. They frequently described the pleasure of mastery and accomplishment, of doing something that worked, and of seeing projects completed. Their strategy of focusing on the finished product gave dignity to their work.

Reflections

One of the strengths of the stories of the participants in this study was their insights into lived experience. The meaning of stories cannot be determined without implicating human life as it is lived. Life and story are not two separate phenomena. They are part of the same fabric, in that life informs and is informed by stories (Widdershoven, 1993). In this research we looked at the relationship between the women's stories and reality. It was there that the implicit meaning of needlework to the women was made explicit. The next process was to be actively sensitive to the representation of the stories so that the meaning of needlework to women was not distorted in the interpretation.

Another strong aspect of this study was the stories the women told about the way they dealt with experiences--their various responses to chaos. The participants' stories of their practices defuse some of the evidence of wasted talent and lost opportunities in women's experiences. The women's undefeated voices testified to the possibilities of changing the course of their lives, no matter how difficult the circumstances. The importance of gender is not exaggerated. Women's roles are not devalued nor is gender identified as an essential handicap. The women communicated an optimism about their lives and those of future generations. The women did not imply that family was a negative part of their lives. They genuinely wanted to find a way to create something of value. They looked for ways to express themselves that did not require a choice between their family life and their work. The strategies that the women employed were relative to the tools and resources available to them. Each

woman told her own story. Each appeared as an individual, making choices out of her set of personal circumstances. Compiled in this study they become part of a larger story of women.

On one occasion I attempted to learn to use a computer graphics program for creating graphs and charts. I had great difficulty following the instructions included in the user's manual which told me to draw the lines that would create boxes for my chart and then insert the information into the boxes. Not only was my text larger than the size of the boxes I tried to draw, but the lines were also misdrawn. My lines usually either failed to meet or overshot their mark. Another more computer literate person ignored the manual and showed me how to successfully meet my goal by using the tools and skills available in a way more suited to my needs. He taught me to write the text and then draw the lines of the chart to fit the information.

This metaphor reflects a portion of Anyon's (1984) theory of accommodation and resistance by adult women. Often the everyday lives of women construct lines around them which define their roles and behavior. They must fit the text of their expected roles within lines that have already been drawn. Dewhurst et al. (1979) suggested that at times women are able to use needle and thread, the traditional tools and techniques of "women's work," to make their own unique statements.

Bell (1938) wrote of women's time for thinking: It seemed to give women an inside pair of eyes; it served as a refreshment to women who felt renewed by it and were better able to face the problems that came up from day to day and would continue as long as life went on. An important value of needlework to women appeared to be the time it afforded for thinking their own thoughts. It also provided a way of interpreting and displaying the results of those thoughts within an acceptable framework.

Implications

The number of studies of the meaning of needlework to women is limited. It appears, from existing data, that needlework fulfills some basic needs. People who are concerned with the socio-psychological status of women could benefit from this scholarly research into the meaning

of needlework and its role in equipping women to deal with the dailiness of their lives. This data should be valuable to needlework industry manufacturers as they develop new products to meet consumers' needs. Words are the data of qualitative research. Readers must reflect on what is said and discover additional congruent themes that will lead to further questions.

Further Research

Stress management professionals endorse sewing as one hobby that can build self-esteem, create a feeling of well being, and establish a sense of accomplishment (Ancona, 1995). They encourage nurturing the psyche as well as the physical body. Further research is necessary to identify the properties of needlework that generate physiological and emotional effects.

This research was problem setting, not problem solving. Additional questions came forth. What are the long term effects of sewing? Why do some women avoid needlework because it makes them "nervous"? Do male stitchers have feelings similar to the women's? In what settings would the therapeutic value of needlework be meaningful and/or useful? How does one "know" that needlework has particular worth for them? What would be the influence of needlework on battered women before and after their experience of violence? What are the implications for children who experience daily violence in their lives? Can needlework play a significant role in the development of self-esteem and pride in accomplishment for low-income youth? For women survival has meant both physical and emotional connection for themselves and their children. Can needlework assist in forging connection? Another area for greater exploration is the meaning women invest in their daily lives. The strategies that women use are relative to their conditions. They are relative to the tools and resources women have available. Many women focus on improving the quality of daily life and on strengthening the connections between people in family, at work, and in the community (Aptheker, 1989). What is the position of needlework within these parameters? Instead of seeking liberation from the needle, the women who participated in this study appear to seek freedom by the needle. What is the fit

between women's evaluation of needlework and their needs to regulate and control events around them? Is needlework a remedy for the "emptiness" often suffered by retirees? Academia, mental and physical health professionals as well as the needlework industry could benefit from continued search for answers to these questions.

The voices of women can be heard in this collection of research. Each woman tells her own story. Each appears as an individual, making choices from her set of personal circumstances. Advocates and scholars have the tools to investigate and communicate. We each have different tasks to do. Some will do research, some will do education, some will write, and some will organize. We must all do what we do best.

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APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Counted Threads

Cross-stitch

This type of counted thread is created by forming an x-shaped stitch on an evenly woven background fabric by sliding the needle between threads, rather than piercing them, at an intersection of threads.

Needlepoint

Needlepoint is made of embroidery stitches done on square meshes of stiff canvas woven especially for it.

Surface Embroidery

Stamped embroidery

The design is printed on a tightly woven background and enhanced with a variety of stitches using embroidery floss.

Crewel

In crewel work the stitcher uses wool threads and a wide variety of stitches to embellish a printed design.

Smocking

Decorative stitches are used to gather folds of fabric to create designs.

Needle Embroidery

Knitting

Knitting stitches are accomplished by using needles to pull a loop of yarn through another loop of yarn.

Crocheting

Crochet is the French word for hook. The needleworker uses a series of chains created with the hook and thread to develop the stitches.

Battenberg lace

To create this type of needlework a pattern is drawn onto paper and ribbon braids are pinned onto the design. A needle with white thread is used to weave the ribbons together in various designs.

Tatting

Tatting can be described as tying knots onto a line of thread and then sliding the knots together to present a lace appearance.

Quilting

Quilting is achieved by stitching together two pieces of cloth with a soft cloth in between. The stitching is done in lines to form a pattern.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is the meaning of needlework in women's lives?

Purpose:

- When did you first begin to do needlework?
- What are you working on now?
- Why is needlework important to you?
- Why does cross-stitch appeal to you?
- How do you choose your projects?
- What is it about cross-stitch that made you know it was the thing you wanted to do?
- How is it different from other activities?

Work:

- Some critics say it is not creative because you are following a pattern. How do you feel about that?
- Do you choose special needlework projects for special times in your life?
- When do you work on your needlework?
- Do you work on it alone or with others?
- What kind of people like to do needlework?
- Can you tell a difference in your work during different times in your life?
- When do you do more challenging projects?
- What hinders your being able to do needlework?

Family:

- Who taught you to do needlework?
- Did doing needlework with this person change your relationship?
- What did you talk about when doing needlework?
- When you were learning to do needlework, how did you feel?
- Do you do needlework with other family members?
- Have you taught anyone?
- How does your family feel about your doing needlework?
- Do you make needlework gifts for your family?
- How has your family life influenced your doing needlework?

Identity:

- How would you describe yourself?
- How does your needlework reflect what is going on in your life?
- What do you think about when you are doing needlework?
- What do you gain from doing needlework?
- Why do needlework instead of another activity?
- How is it therapy?
- How do you feel as you work?
- What do you think about when you are doing needlework?
- How do you value your needlework?

NOTES

[1]The complete study is available by contacting Hobby Industry Association, Box 348, Elmwood Park, NJ 07407.

[2]Clapper Communications Companies is the publisher of Crafts 'n Things to which participants in the survey subscribe. The company has been publishing various how-to magazines since 1951.